

CRISIS IN CHINA

The Story of the Sian Mutiny



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GENERALISSIMO CHIANG KAI-SHEK WITH HIS CAPTOR, THE
“YOUNG MARSHAL,” CHANG HSUTH-LIANG

CRISIS IN CHINA

The Story of the Sian Mutiny

BY

JAMES M. BERTRAM

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TO
THE MANCHURIAN VOLUNTEERS
IN HOMAGE

FOREWORD

THE CHINESE PUZZLE

EARLY on the morning of December 12th, 1936, on a frozen hillside in North-west China, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was captured by rebel troops of the "Young Marshal" Chang Hsueh-liang. The General did not die at dawn, though at the time many feared—and some hoped—that he had.

The world learnt the news the next day with some concern. Even in Europe, which has grown used to alarms with its morning paper, the bare report must have sounded ominous. In the Far East the first effects were shattering. This was something even more startling and unexpected than the military coup in Tokio ten months before, with its long roll of distinguished victims. Japan has a tradition of political assassination that is peculiarly its own; and honourable murder, with *hara-kiri*, is almost a vocation for younger patriots. In China, as a rule, these things are less crudely done.

Moreover, the interest attached to the principals in the Sian affair was considerable. In these days of authoritarian governments, we are all familiar with the trick of identifying a name with a nation. Because of this, or perhaps because one Chinese name was all that most people could conveniently remember at a time, Chiang Kai-shek had come to stand (at least

abroad) for the Nanking Government, if not for China. His fate was the fate of the Republic.

And for once the popular view was not so far wrong. The Generalissimo—it is his own phrase—“*was* the government.” Anything which happened to Chiang Kai-shek was likely to be momentous for China, and for all the Great Powers with an interest in the Far East. As Madame Chiang herself remarked, with a pardonable touch of hyperbole, it seemed not unlikely that Sian, “the cradle of the Chinese race,” might also be its coffin.

For now, by a single stroke, China’s hero had become the prisoner of China’s *enfant terrible*. Chang Hsueh-liang, whom most people in the West still thought of as an irresponsible drug-addict, had once been very much in the public eye. He had faded gracefully out of the headlines after the loss of Manchuria, for which an uncharitable world made him the chief scapegoat. But with the Sian coup he made a most spectacular come-back. The “kidnapping” of the Generalissimo by the most romantic of his subordinates had all the elements of international melodrama. To imagine a parallel sensation in the West, one would have to think of Signor Mussolini detained in a desert hotel by the Governor of Libya; or of the Chancellor of the Third Reich decoyed into General Goering’s hunting-lodge on the anniversary of June 30th.

For a fortnight after the Sian story broke, the world was aware of China, and more than a little apprehensive. The situation was complicated by an almost complete lack of news. The circumstances of the coup were unusual, its effects incalculable. The experts were left guessing, and the newspapers sur-

passed themselves in speculative and contradictory comment. Honest editors labelled the whole thing "Chinese Puzzle," and left it at that.

But one surprise followed another. On Christmas Day, with a gesture of repentance worthy of the heroes of antiquity, the "Young Marshal" flew his prisoner back to Loyang, and safety, in his private aeroplane. Here at last was a good news story, and a most piquant anti-climax. Harassed commentators wrote off the affair as just one more Chinese kidnapping, and promptly forgot it. Another "Crisis in China" was over.

This book is an attempt to describe what really happened in that December crisis, and to show something of its real significance for China and the world at large.

Far Eastern politics are remote, obscure, and picturesque only on occasion. The remoteness and obscurity are a convenient excuse for preoccupation with the picturesque. Most Westerners who notice China at all, see it with the eyes of the Hollywood film-producers, who have lately found there a "brave new world" with superb material for scenarios. Against this background of mystery and teeming millions, such periodic "incidents" as do attract attention are apt to be more lurid than comprehensible. It is the business of Far Eastern editors to make them so. They know that their public can only take China in small doses, with a suitable dash of the fantastic. Marco Polo set a literary tradition that has proved very long-lived.

But now that a "Divine Wind" of Japanese goodwill can waft the Emperor's envoys to London in four days, we have begun to realise that the East is

rather nearer to the West than it used to be. And since what happens in Nanking or Tokio is quite as likely to concern us all as what happens in Addis Ababa or Madrid—since, in a word, the problems of the Far East are a part of the world problem—it is high time to look behind the headlines. No student of international affairs needs to be reminded that any critical turn of events in China or Japan deserves careful consideration. But it is important that more than a few people should realise it.

For the gathering storm over Asia does not threaten just the frozen steppes of Mongolia, or the brown North China plain. Since the conclusion of the “anti-Communist” alliance between Germany and Japan, a cloud that hangs across the Yellow Sea may break as soon on the Vlatava, or along the Rhine. Britain’s eastern frontiers stretch from Sydney to Hong Kong. From Lake Baikal to Vladivostok the Red Army stands on guard for the Soviet Union. America’s life-line in the Pacific (to use a favourite Japanese term) is traced in the wake of the China Clipper.

Focus of all these forces is China Proper, which has been called the most defenceless of all great nations.

There is always a crisis in China—the continuing crisis of a vast Asiatic society that has felt the first labour-pangs of social revolution, and has the geographical misfortune to be neighbour to the youngest and most aggressive of imperialist Powers. And the post-War history of the Chinese Republic has been pre-eminently conditioned by these two factors—revolution and Japanese aggression. Both are phenomena of such importance that inevitably they must be played out on a world stage.

The native revolutionary movement in China

reached its highest point in the "Ta Keh Ming," or Great Revolution of 1925-27, which broke on the reactionary forces of the Right Kuomintang, in their turn aided by the Shanghai bankers and the foreign Powers. All that was revolutionary in it (and the continuing impetus of so vast an upheaval was considerable) passed into the Chinese Soviets, and the Peasants' and Workers' Red Armies. For nearly a decade after 1927, through incredible privations and in the teeth of continuous campaigns of suppression, the Red Army, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, kept the banners of revolution flying in China. It was a feat of tenacity and endurance unexampled in modern history.

But in the last few years, the most notable single feature in the Far East has been Japan's encroachment into North China, and the "steady and collective assistance" of the other Western Powers to her unprovoked acts of aggression. Before this relentless march of conquest, China's efforts at self-defence have hitherto been half-hearted, and patently ineffective.

From 1931 to 1936 the Nanking Government followed with admirable consistency a "policy of surrender," which preserved a kind of integrity for the capital and its adjacent provinces, at the expense of North China and Inner Mongolia. Sympathetic foreigners claimed that Chiang Kai-shek could take no other course. But a part of the Chinese people, at least, thought differently. Each concession made to the Japanese demands provoked some open protest against the policy of the Kuomintang.

The Tangku Truce of May 1933, which signed away five provinces, led directly to the rising in

Fukien in November, and the "People's Government" set up with the help of the 19th Route Army—one of the few Chinese forces that have ever done any fighting against the Japanese. The Nanking régime, so irresolute in its dealings with Japan, showed no lack of resolution in tackling internal opposition; the 19th Route Army was speedily bombed into submission. The secret Ho-Umetsu Agreement of June 1935 (between the Chinese Minister of War and the commander of the Japanese North China garrison) stirred up such popular indignation that the "Autonomy Movement" of another five provinces, ingeniously planned by General Doihara and his friends for November of that year, failed ignominiously. In the summer of 1936 the South-western provinces combined once more in opposition to the policy of Nanking; this movement was somewhat suspect, but it is noteworthy that it could only command mass support on a programme of more active resistance to the inroads of Japan.

Five years of apologetic but unambiguous surrender to the invader had been five years of suppression of popular organisation throughout China. This is the reverse side of Nanking's medal of non-resistance. In all Japan's demands on the Chinese Government, one was a constant—it was crystallised in the first of Mr. Hirota's famous "Three Points" in 1936. This is the demand for the suppression by force of the Chinese Communists and of any kind of anti-Japanese activity. Up to the time of his capture in Sian, Chiang Kai-shek might have claimed that he had observed this injunction very faithfully.

And this was the real significance of the Sian mutiny, which seemed to so many outside observers

to have come like a bolt from a clear sky. It was only the last and most striking in a long series of protests against the suppression of the patriotic movement, and the continued waste of millions of Chinese lives and treasure in civil war, at a time when China's very existence as an independent nation was threatened.

For some months before the Sian incident occurred popular sentiment in China had been widely canvassed in favour of a United Front of national defence. As early as August 1935, the Chinese Communist Party had pledged itself to change its programme of agrarian revolution to one of moderate social reform, to co-operate with the Kuomintang, and to support a democratically elected congress of "National Salvation" in order to resist Japan. This was an olive-branch from what had always been considered the most implacable enemy of the National Government.

In June of the next year, the All-China National Salvation Association was formed, as an open organisation sponsored by many well-known public figures, including Madame Sun Yat-sen. The movement, which stood for a united front of all parties in face of the national crisis, found support in liberal political circles, and claimed with some justice to be advocating the policy recommended by the "Father of the Chinese Revolution." Sun Yat-sen himself had long been installed in his sumptuous tomb on the Purple Mountain, a most inappropriate resting-place for one of the very few successful political leaders in China who died a poor man. But though his successors had made that enigmatic and compelling personality into the plaster saint of the Kuomintang, his policies, it seemed, had been put on

the index expurgatorius. A bare month before the Sian coup, the National Salvation Association was suppressed, and seven of its most prominent leaders clapped into prison on the ridiculous charge of "propagating doctrines contrary to the Three Peoples' Principles."

The arrests at Shanghai were the signal for the Sian revolt, though it was Chiang Kai-shek's attempt to continue with the campaign against the Red Armies that actually provoked it. And the issue raised at Sian was this fundamental question of national policy: "unification of the country" along the familiar lines of suppression by force of all opposition elements, and the old inconclusive "diplomacy" with Japan; or the organic unity of all parties in an attempt at effective resistance. The "banner of revolt" hoisted by Chang Hsueh-liang with the defiance of desperation, was the banner of a democratic united front of national liberation. The choice offered to Chiang Kai-shek was the choice between democracy and dictatorship, between civil peace and civil war, between surrender to Japanese imperialism and the continuing struggle of national revolution. If the lesson of Sian has been learnt, and the result of that December mutiny should indeed prove to be the reconciliation of warring elements and the growth of a real United Front in China, then the midwinter of 1936-37 may prove a turning-point in Far Eastern history.

Madame Chiang Kai-shek, who played so courageous and devoted a part throughout the Sian crisis, has told very frankly her own story of the *coup d'état* in a series of articles which appeared originally in the *New York Times*. This, and the "Diary" of the

Generalissimo himself covering the period of his captivity (which appears to have been written more for official purposes), are the chief publications of first-rate importance relating to the Sian episode. Madame Chiang's story in particular is full of personal interest, and contains—upon impeccable authority—some interesting revelations about the reaction to the coup in Nanking. But there should still be room for a fuller account of events whose course was so dramatic, and which seemed at the time so baffling and inconclusive.

In the chapters that follow I have tried to tell the story of Sian as a direct narrative, hoping to recapture something of the original atmosphere of suspense. I have put it in the form of personal history for a number of reasons (not least because it was easiest to write that way). I happened to be the only foreign journalist to reach the "rebel capital" during nearly three months of blockade: so—for what it is worth—these pages have the value of an eye-witness account of one part of a revolutionary movement. The first section of the book, which some may consider unnecessary, describes a journey into Shensi across a front of civil war. Here, at least, I should like to express my gratitude to the Chinese companion without whose help that journey might never have been completed.

In so slight a sketch one can only suggest some of the outstanding problems that confront the Chinese people at this present stage. But Sian, as I saw it, brought together some of the most interesting elements in Chinese society, and in an atmosphere of tension which heightened the characteristic features of each group. If this book can throw light

on a complicated and critical moment in Chinese history it will have fulfilled its main purpose. I hope it may also be of some interest as an outline picture of China today.

I should like here to thank all those friends—Chinese and European—to whose kindness and patience I owe anything I may have learnt about China. Especially I am grateful to my friends among the Chinese students, who gave me an insight into a youth movement that has made—and will make—history. I hope this brief pencilling of a *Crisis in China* may contribute to the sympathetic understanding of some of her difficulties today. For never more than now has China been in need of the sympathy and assistance of all the “friendly foreign nations who are prepared to treat her as an equal.”

J. B.

PEIPING,
May 1937

POSTSCRIPT

THE greater “crisis in China” which has developed in the short time since this book went to the printers has prevented the author either from seeing it through the press or from adding the short final chapter which he had intended. In the event, the political situation which he describes has come to a head and China has been forced to fight desperately for her life against the Japanese “ghosts.” Readers of this book will appreciate clearly the reasons behind this sudden resort to war on a large scale. While a dis-united China, whose military resources were devoted to “unifying” campaigns against the Red armies of the north, existed, Japan’s task of slow economic and military permeation was comparatively easy. But in China, through a maze of differing parties and conflicting interests, there was growing a steady understanding and unity on one point—resistance to Japan. It was this, as the author shows, which lay behind the dramatic kidnapping of last December. The *coup d'état* seemed to the outside world a failure; but in fact it succeeded. Chinese would no longer fight against Chinese. China had found a new unity; and so, before it should have time to form and strengthen itself, Japan turned swiftly and shrewdly to war on a large scale.

In the last chapter of this book, the author describes a farewell dinner with his friends among the “rebel” sympathisers in Sian; and the toasts which they drank to Chiang Kai-shek and the new

unity of China. Those toasts and those sentiments throughout China were Japan's declaration of war.

Nor was it sufficient to press slowly on with the long and difficult task of creating an "autonomous" North China. The technique that succeeded in 1932 in Manchuria was too dangerous when faced with this new and frightening possibility of a strong government in Nanking, resolved on resistance. It was necessary to strike at the same time a devastating blow at Shanghai, China's commercial heart, to bring death, disorder and anarchy, and, in the words of a recent Japanese spokesman, "to beat China to her knees." And so there is war in the Far East.

J. M.

August 1937

CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD: THE CHINESE PUZZLE	vii
POSTSCRIPT	xvii
I. THE TWELFTH OF DECEMBER	1
II. DEATH OF A HERO?	14
III. WE GO TO SIAN	27
IV. NORTH-EASTERN	41
V. YELLOW RIVER	59
VI. A TEMPLE OF THE WATERS	76
VII. THE WALLS OF SIAN	93
VIII. BANDIT-SUPPRESSOR OF THE NORTH-WEST	107
IX. MIDWINTER MUTINY	124
X. THE PRISONER OF SIAN	139
XI. MEN OF GOODWILL	155
XII. INSIDE SIAN	172
XIII. PROPAGANDA	188
XIV. HAPPY NEW YEAR	202
XV. MASS MEETINGS AND MISSIONARIES	219
XVI. THE GODS DEPART	236
XVII. THE NORTH-WEST IN ARMS	253
XVIII. THE RED ARMY MARCHES	270
XIX. DIRECT ACTION	287
XX. NATIONAL FRONT	303

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>FACING PAGE</i>
Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek with his Captor, the “Young Marshal,” Chang Hsueh-liang	Frontispiece
The Police and the Students: Phases of a strange Relation- ship	10
Canton	19
Peking Carts: the most uncomfortable Vehicles ever designed	74
Sand, Ice, and Dust: the Yellow River in Midwinter	74
Our Hosts at Yu Men K’ou	86
Hsi Men K’ou, Sister Fortress of Yu Men K’ou	86
Outside the West Gate of Feng Ching-tsai’s Capital	102
Pa Ch’iao—the most famous Bridge in China	102
Principals in the Sian Drama	126
The Men behind the Revolt	126
Snow-covered Villas at Lintung	134
The Drum Tower at “Sian”	134
Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek	150
Chou En-lai, Political Commissar of the First Front Red Army	150
Agnes Smedley in the Uniform of the Red Army	178
The Three Musketeers of Sian	178
Red Army Children	194
A “Veteran” of the Red Intelligence Corps	194
Nanking Bombers and Fighters on Show at the Sian Aerodrome on New Year’s Day	204
Shensi Troops march smartly past their Commander, General Yang Hu-cheng	204
Yang Hu-cheng’s private House in Sian	206
New Year’s Day Celebrations	206

	FACING PAGE
The Mass Meeting of January 9th	238
Hitler greets Wang Ching-wei	238
China's finest Cavalry	240
Peasant Guards carrying their long red-tufted Spears in the Armed Procession	240
The Swan Song of the Sian Rebels	283

MAP

Route to Sian	<i>End paper</i>
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I

THE TWELFTH OF DECEMBER

WHILE dawn broke in Shensi, about the time that Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek was scrambling up the hills behind Lintung in his night-shirt, stealthy activity of a rather similar kind was going on in the schools and universities of Peking.

Through back gates and over dormitory walls, small groups of students were making their way out into the dim lanes of the city. They wore padded winter gowns and woollen mufflers; many of the girls were in blue slacks and flannel shirts. All this advance guard carried with them rolled-up banners and bundles of printed handbills. They were preparing for a patriotic demonstration, and the police had got wind of it.

Foreigners living in Peking do not as a rule take much notice of student demonstrations. The phenomenon is recurrent, and has had at times important political consequences. But there is a general impression among foreigners that the students only organise at end of term, apparently preferring the known risk of bullets to the unknown hazards of the examination room. That solemn and admirable institution, the British Embassy, still believes that these children are paid twenty cents apiece to face machine-guns and arrest, and the traditional Chinese torture that is

reserved nowadays for political prisoners. Some of them have certainly earned it.

But Peking society is a world of its own, upon which living China seldom impinges. Its amusements are graceful and slightly decadent, as becomes life in an ancient capital. This polyglot society that revolves in the vacuum of the Legation Quarter and the East City is an anachronism, a picturesque survival, like the foreign colony in Florence before the War and Mussolini arrived. Only Proust and Musset together could do justice to its charming irrelevance and acrid fatuity. It is a world in which no one grows up, in which serious events are an invitation to a cocktail party, or a moonlight visit to the Temple of Heaven. The charm of Peking, like the charm of Oxford, is fatal. Those who have lived in both places seldom recover.

Peking people are proud of their "culture" (though only the Americans call it this), which they absorb from palace walls, Sung paintings, and the most intelligent book-store in China. They have a justifiable contempt for the commercially-minded inhabitants of the treaty ports, who shout at their boys in pidgin English, and do not know the difference between Han and Ming. Most Peking people have, indeed, a real feeling for China: and they will defend this feeling as passionately as a lover.

But so often it is for a China of the past. They look for what is old or quaint or beautiful: their fine susceptibilities are bruised by a radio in a temple court, or a latinised text that threatens to supplant the picturesque Chinese character. They go to uncomfortable theatres to hear Mei Lan-fang or Ch'eng Yen-ch'iu, the most accomplished virtuosi of the old

Peking drama that flourishes outside Ch'ien Men; but they find attempts at a realistic modern drama grotesque and slightly indecent. The flavour of the past comes to them from the exquisite pages of T'ang poetry, not the bitter futility of the present from some surreptitious news-sheet. All that has happened since the Manchus seems to them a mistake of history.

They are interested in China as pattern, not in China as change.

And Peking—that home of lost imperial causes—is all on their side. It brings them fewer reminders than any other large city of the social ferment at work over all China today. It guards them gravely with its ponderous walls, charms them with its annual fairs, delights with a vista of golden roofs above brooding cedars, and the far, delicate line of its Western Hills. Peking is the last sanctuary of the Soul of China.

And the Soul of China is a dangerous myth. It may draw a new Golden Horde of tourists from luxury liners to this old capital that withstood the Mongols, gladdening the hearts of the curio-dealers and the traffickers in temple-lore. But it has had devastating effects on the foreign population in the one city in China where foreigners are often intelligent and not seldom well-informed. Those Peking people who are most in love with China are often most unaware of China's real problems. Peking Culture mists their gaze.

For things of general interest besides diplomatic scandals and peculiarly gruesome murders do happen sometimes in Peking. When Japanese troops fight miniature battles on the glacis around the Legation Quarter, and the Emperor's sacred tanks advance de-

structively along the main streets, even the foreigner is apt to feel resentful. The Chinese merchants at the doors of their shops watch in inscrutable calm. In the rear of the crowd, perhaps, a blue-gowned student stands scowling.

In all Peking, only the students are vocal. Only they, in the armed truce that hangs uneasily over North China, dare organise and raise the cry of national resistance in the streets where the Japanese tanks lumber at will. And when this happens, when the banners are raised beneath the *pailous*, and the students march in thousands beside the moat and the great towers of the Forbidden City, it is the Mausers and big swords of Chinese police that scatter their ranks and turn them back.

On that morning of December 12th, when so many things were happening in distant Shensi, a car-load of newspaper-men went in search of the demonstration. The universities of Peking are in the western part of the city, which is perhaps one reason why so few foreigners ever see them. In recent years, no procession has been allowed within a mile of the Japanese Legation.

The streets were filled with the usual crowds of pedlars and water-carriers and nonchalant pedestrians. But we passed the gates of schools where policemen armed with rifles barred an exit to the excited students inside. As yet, there were no gendarmes in sight—the Special Police, whose leather jackets and motor-cycles are a familiar feature on all such occasions. These are shock troops, specially trained for violence; and very different from the amiable Guardians of Public Safety who lounge

peacefully at the entrance to any public building in China.

"Looks like being quite a good show," said my friend Don, a young American correspondent who had seen many student demonstrations. "With no gendarmes around, most of the middle-schools must be out." He sucked hard on a pipe, and caressed his unshaven chin. The morning air was crisp, with a tang of frost.

West of the main street that runs north and south through this part of the city, we came across the first group of students. They were walking fast and purposefully along a narrow *hutung*, continually joined by twos and threes who seemed to emerge from every gate and corner. Couriers on bicycles scouted vigilantly in advance of the ragged column. If police should appear at this stage, it would be easy to break up and reform later on.

We stopped an earnest-looking youth with a peaked cap, who carried a sheaf of flimsy, gaily-coloured handbills. "Where are you meeting?" Don asked genially. The boy frowned suspiciously, and began to turn away: but a girl student with short hair falling into her eyes ran up, eager to explain.

"These are foreign journalists—they are our friends." She thrust a handful of manifestoes and cartoons into the back of the car. "At the Western Arches—as soon as we can get there. The Peita students are coming from the east. Mass meeting behind the Coal Hill at ten." She left us with a wave of the hand, and the little group, aware of an audience, shouted their slogans: "China must not perish! Down with Japanese Imperialism!" It was all very youthful and light-hearted. Trouble would

come later, when the groups joined together in the main streets.

At the four Western Arches, where the great red *pailous* tower above the cross-road, there was the usual police guard; but still no gendarmes. We waited until the front of the marching column, now three or four thousand strong, emerged on the main street, and began to cross it, moving east. The banners were up by now, and the songs had started. A crowd had gathered at the cross-road. Coolies struggling with loads that would tax the strength of a farm-horse set down their barrows, and straightened to watch, wiping the sweat from their eyes. Undersized apprentices from the market ran shouting beside the banners.

There is something curiously stimulating about a marching column—a fact which is appreciated in the Tempelhof and on the Red Square. But I think I have been more stirred by a student procession in China than by Labour Day in Hitler's Berlin, or by a Comsomol anniversary in Moscow. It is such a gesture of desperation, so forlorn a hope in the face of overwhelming odds. The only question is how far they will get before they are broken; before the big swords flash in the sun, or the guns fire. More than half of the students in any demonstration in Peking are children from middle-schools, between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Yet volunteers will always be found to march in front of the column to break a police cordon or face a rifle volley.

That day, as it happened, was the day of Tuan Chi-jei's funeral; and the former leader of the notorious Anfu clique, the most corrupt government North China ever saw, was being buried from his old

capital, full of years and honour. Marshal Tuan was the man who had given the order to fire on the Peking students on March 18th, 1926, when they had been trapped in a narrow lane outside his official residence. When the crowd broke in panic from the fire of Tuan's guards, nearly a hundred bodies lay piled between the walls, their blood soaking quietly into the dust. That day had been the end of Tuan Chi-jei's political career, but it did not affect the magnificence of his funeral.

Still, it seemed that the funeral, leaving from a temple near the wall for the Western Hills, had drawn most of the police from the city. The procession was now five thousand strong, and marching well. Ahead was the gate where they hoped to join with the contingent led by Peking National University, now advancing west.

A small squad of Special Police had appeared, and was keeping pace with the moving column. They were obviously waiting their chance to attack. It came suddenly outside the temple-gate of a girls' school. Students broke from their ranks and ran to the gate, calling to the girls inside to come out and join the demonstration. There was a gap in the column, and with drawn swords and pistols the police charged into it.

In a moment, all was savage confusion. Many girls, running to escape the sudden attack, tripped in their long gowns and fell. Those who stopped to help them up were beaten with the flat of the swords or kicked with heavy boots. The girls did not escape punishment—many were beaten with swords or with the heavy leather straps that Chinese policemen carry to use on rickshaw-men and beggars.

The charge had been well timed, and the column was temporarily broken. A number of banners were captured, and several arrests made. But this was only a check; there were not enough police to make matters really serious. Leaders rallied the ranks, with the cry "Join forces!" The other column was only a quarter of a mile away. We could see the banners across the street, and hear the sound of shouting.

"Do you think they can make it?" I asked Don. We were on foot, busily taking photographs. He jerked a thumb towards the gate-tower in front. "Look at that!"

A group of some thirty gendarmes stood before the gate, holding the road between the two advancing columns. They had rifles and machine-guns. This looked more serious. We hurried to the head of the procession, which had halted for a council of war.

Only a few hundred yards separated the two main groups—together, they would total ten thousand. It was a rare chance for the Peking students. And the police were absurdly few in number, to handle a crowd of this size. But there were the guns, and it seemed likely now that they would use them. The day was young, and too promising to invite disaster. It was decided to withdraw.

The order ran along the ranks; there were murmurs against it, but the discipline was good. To turn in this position was to ask for attack. But the banners were reversed, and the unwieldy column began to move. "Now they're for it!" someone muttered behind me.

Sure enough, a compact knot of leather jackets was approaching at the run. Their intention was clear—to charge the slow-moving mass from behind, so that

it would pile up and jam. Students in the rear of the column looked back apprehensively, but they did not break ranks. The police quickened their pace for the charge. This looked like a massacre.

But just as the sergeant—a heavily built man with a Mauser at full cock—gave the order, there came a strange intervention. Behind the police, a student had appeared on a bicycle. His advance was calm, unhurried, almost stately. Smiling cheerfully, he addressed the police as he passed them:

"Fellow-countrymen! Why do you attack us? We are not against you—we are only against the Japanese ghosts. We love our country, as you do. Chinese don't fight against Chinese!"

It worked like a charm, for it had been done so smoothly and easily. The police stopped in their tracks: the fierce expressions they had assumed were wiped from their faces with comical suddenness. Quick to seize their advantage, the students shouted "Hurrah for the patriotic Chinese police!" After that, of course, there was nothing more to be done.

Such incidents are not uncommon—the Chinese are one of the most emotional races in the world, and a well-timed appeal will almost always have its effect on them. I have seen an officer of gendarmes release a group of arrested students, and break down and weep with patriotic zeal while the students stood around and cheered. It is perhaps an unfortunate irony that with this emotional generosity can go a peculiarly cold-blooded kind of cruelty. Later in the day, these same police who had been pulled up with a word in public, made savage and unprovoked attacks upon the students who had applauded their

good-nature. Turning the procession from the main streets into narrow *hutungs*, they rode into it from behind with motor-cycles. Leaders who had been picked out by plain-clothes men were seized and led down alleys, where they were unmercifully beaten as a prelude to arrest. And all the time Japanese officials from an Embassy car looked on.

There are many people who believe that all demonstrations are futile, a waste of time and energy that only exasperates authorities and achieves nothing. But in China, where there is not even the pretence of freedom of speech or assembly, where a vigilant government is only too ready to detect any unwary statement either critical of itself or calculated to cause annoyance to the good neighbour, Japan, these student demonstrations in the past have been the only open expression of other than official opinion. Some purists would quibble at the assertion that the May Fourth movement in 1919 "overthrew the Anfu Government"; or that the Student Movement in December 1935 "frustrated the plans of Japan for an autonomous North China." But there can be no doubt that these movements were the first open expression of popular dissatisfaction, and made possible in the event what without them might never have been achieved. In China, the students have to be taken seriously, for they are the only articulate unarmed opposition in the country.

The demonstration of December 12th in Peking was a success, though not altogether in the way that might have been expected. It was a mass protest against the invasion of Japanese-paid Mongols into Suiyuan; against the armed occupation of Tsingtao by Japanese marines; against the arrest of certain



Led down a side alley, this student is unmercifully beaten before being arrested



An officer of the guard comes overcome with emotion after releasing arrested students

THE POLICE AND THE STUDENTS: PHASES OF A STRANGE RELATIONSHIP

prominent leaders of the patriotic movement. It was an appeal for stronger action against aggression, and for at least a measure of political freedom at home. And the Japanese authorities took it seriously enough to follow the whole route of the processions with staff cars. Finally they warned that most uncomfortably situated of Chinese officials, General Sung Cheh-yuan, that unless the Chinese troops turned out to keep the peace, the Japanese guards would take a hand. So the early afternoon saw the processions scattered, and the largest remnant—a crowd of some five thousand students—trapped inside the grounds of the Coal Hill, with several companies of the 29th Route Army on guard outside.

This was a strange enough scene, that only Peking could provide. Inside the massive gates, so impressively guarded by police and soldiery, at the foot of the five-coned hill on which the last of the Ming emperors hanged himself, the imprisoned students improvised a mass meeting. Directly opposite the gates, within the golden-tiled palaces of the Forbidden City, alarmed officials held whispered conference. The students had been told that General Sung himself would come and talk to them; but the hours passed, and finally it was announced that the General was in the Western Hills, at Tuan Chi-jei's funeral. It was growing dusk: the five pavilions on the crest of the hill were silhouetted against the evening sky.

We waited outside the gate; no one was allowed in or out. "I don't like this," my Chinese companion remarked. "They'll wait until dark, and then let the gendarmes loose on them." This had happened before.

But suddenly there was a stir among the officials at the palace-gate: the Mayor of Peking had arrived. Silk-gowned figures bobbed like marionettes. A little Japanese, very correct in a dark overcoat with fur collar, was talking excitedly. What was the news?

"The Mayor will talk to the students," announced a fat detective in an astrakhan cap. I looked at my Chinese friend wonderingly. "Does this often happen?"

"I can't understand it," he answered. "But see, he is going in." In the centre of a solid phalanx of police, the Mayor was swept through the gates, which closed again after him.

The Mayor talked for a long time. What he said, as we learnt afterwards, was not so very much to the point; but he was surprisingly affable. The shouts of approval or dissent that came muffled through the heavy gates were followed with keen interest by the crowd outside.

At last there came a burst of cheering. The gates were opened; Mayor Chin came out hurriedly. He seemed relieved and yet anxious. "The students will march out again," we heard the rumour. "He told them to march back to their schools, carrying their banners, and singing their songs without fear." Officialdom had melted. But why? Nobody could guess.

Into the darkening streets the students poured exultantly. Police, soldiers had vanished. East and west they marched between the ancient walls, along streets suddenly crowded with onlookers. The shouted slogans echoed back. The white banners passed beneath the street lights.

The familiar songs of "National Salvation" carried clearly on the night air. Some of them were taken up by the passers-by. But as the last group marched out from the empty park, leaving the uneasy shade of the last Chinese emperor alone with shadows, I heard a new song. It had a strong, rolling rhythm, not unlike the "Marseillaise," and alien to the plangent, rather stilted movement of most Chinese music.

"What are they singing?"

My friend turned to me: his eyes were shining behind his thick glasses. "That is the marching song of the Red Army. It has never been sung in the streets of Peking before."

Several hours later, a student came to me with a hastily printed broadsheet. His hands trembled as he held it.

"Have you heard? Chiang Kai-shek was killed by the North-eastern troops in Sian this morning."

We understood.

II

DEATH OF A HERO?

NOBODY knew. Rumours of the death of Chiang Kai-shek used to be common in China. In later years they had been less common. But this was something more than a rumour.

What had happened on December 12th in Sian, the City of Western Peace, capital of China's most ancient dynasties? There had been a rebellion and Chang Hsueh-liang and Yang Hu-cheng (the local Shensi commander) had been the leaders of it. So much seemed clear. Between them they had captured the Generalissimo. They had sent a telegram to the Central Government at Nanking announcing this fact and making certain demands for a change of national policy. The versions of these demands differed; interpretations of them were as far apart as Moscow and Tokio. One question came up again and again in these first few days—had Chiang Kai-shek been killed?

The Young Marshal, it was learned, had sent a personal telegram to Madame Chiang, assuring her of her husband's safety. Those who knew Chang Hsueh-liang were confident that this must be true. Others, who knew only his "shifty and treacherous" past, were more sceptical and believed it a ruse. But anyone who knew Chang's troops, the old North-eastern Army from Manchuria, said that whatever the

Young Marshal might have wished to do, his troops would have settled the matter by now. Chiang's life was not worth a copper cash.

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The first news caused widespread dismay throughout China. This was certainly a tribute to Chiang Kai-shek's reputation, if hardly a vote of confidence in the Nanking Government. But in recent months even those who were unsympathetic towards the Generalissimo personally had come to regard him as the "strong man" uniting China, the only possible leader of the whole nation. Two things above all had strengthened this view. The first was the peaceful settlement of the rebellious movement in the Southwest that summer, led by the Kwangsi generals Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hai. The second was the common belief, after the autumn invasions in Suiyuan had apparently infected Chinese diplomacy with a new vigour, that at last the Nanking Government was beginning a policy of active resistance to Japanese aggression.

In the interval came two other events, one a most happy omen, the other more disturbing.

On October 30th, after a certain amount of indecision about the date, the Generalissimo's fiftieth birthday was celebrated with aerial honours. The occasion was used for a great drive to strengthen the nation's Air Force. Provincial Governments and Chambers of Commerce vied with one another in presenting "birthday planes" to the leader of the national struggle against Japan. Much of the money was subscribed all over the country by school children and the very poor. We shall meet these planes again.

Early in November, a great strike broke out among the workers in the cotton-mills in Shanghai. At first a general strike, it became concentrated after the first week in the Japanese-owned mills, and had frankly a political motive. The strike spread like wildfire to Tientsin, Tsingtao, and Tsinan. It was the first serious stirring of the labour movement in years.

In October I had travelled perilously down the newly completed Hankow-Canton railroad (which was rushed through to enable Chiang to send troops to quell the Liangkwang rising); and I was in Canton for the birthday celebrations. The South-western affair was settled with silver bullets. When I arrived Chen Chi-tang, military despot of Kwangtung, had already departed on a pleasure cruise to Europe—or, as the Chinese more gracefully express it, “to study abroad.” He was one of the most notorious grafters in China, who had smuggled his own contraband up the Pearl River in Government gunboats and kept himself in power by the methods of a Chicago gangster aided by an extremely efficient Gestapo.

Pai Chung-hsi, ruler of Kwangsi, and the real moving spirit of the revolt, was of different mettle. Formerly Chiang Kai-shek’s Chief of Staff on the Northern Expedition of the Revolutionary Army, he is widely regarded as (after the Generalissimo) one of the ablest military and political leaders in China. After the collapse of Chen Chi-tang he withdrew into the fastnesses of his own province, which he has governed with striking success in the last few years. When the South-western movement was settled Pai accepted new posts in Nanking; but he has as yet shown no inclination to leave his own preserves for

the less salubrious air of the Purple Mountain. He had no wish to follow Feng Yu-hsiang into public honour and political impotence.

Chen Chi-tang does not concern us here, except perhaps indirectly. It may be said, without undue cynicism, that a great deal of the enthusiasm in Canton at the union with Nanking and the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek on a state visit, was belated rejoicing at the departure of Chen Chi-tang. With the exception of a recent Prime Minister of England, I have seldom known anyone so universally disliked. But Pai Chung-hsi is still an important figure in Chinese politics, and he will come into this story again.

On the more important question of the popularity of the Generalissimo in South China, it is not easy to comment. Chiang Kai-shek is himself a southerner, and it was at the Military Academy at Whampoa, near Canton, that he first made his reputation. He left Canton as commander of the Northern Expedition in 1926, and had not been back in the momentous ten years that saw the triumph of the Right Kuomintang, the establishment of the Nanking Government with the financial support of the bankers of Shanghai, and its gradual extension of power until it represented something like a National Government. His triumphal re-entry into the most characteristically Chinese of all the great cities had all the appearance of a final reconciliation of Nanking with the South, thus marking the most important advance in years towards national unification.

On Chiang's birthday brass bands and fusillades of crackers added to the accustomed din of Canton made a bedlam of jubilation. That night I was in a little cinema that showed a special film of Chiang

Kai-shek reviewing his "gift aeroplanes"; this was followed by a news-reel of a military demonstration in the Red Square. When the Generalissimo's figure appeared on the screen the audience rose as one man and joined in the Kuomintang hymn. But Stalin and the Red Army were cheered.

Canton last knew Chiang Kai-shek as a revolutionary commander (a title which he has been proud to keep); and Chiang was careful not to disabuse his southern supporters. He had not a direct hand in the brutal suppression of the revolutionary movement in the South, for the simple reason that his official writ did not run there. Now Nanking is playing for the further support of Kwangtung by an elaborate programme of construction and industrial development, heavily financed by Great Britain—whose interests in South China are growing every month. But if Nanking is to keep the allegiance of the South-west, it must follow a policy not unacceptable to the home of the National Revolution.

In Shanghai at the time of the strike the patriotic movement, led by the National Salvation Association (an all-party organisation), was at its height. Funds were being raised for the defence of Suiyuan, and merchants and bankers were openly supporting the Association. Anti-Japanese feeling ran higher than ever, with a dash of confidence in it that was new.

I remember vividly the rude shock that was felt in all circles in Shanghai when seven of the leaders of the National Salvation Association were suddenly arrested on the night of November 22nd and handed over—after some very questionable proceedings in the Settlement Courts—to the Chinese authorities.



CANTON

This, the most Chinese of the great cities, has almost more contrasts than Shanghai

The grounds for arrest were subversive and treasonable activities; the Japanese had accused the Association of being behind the strike in the cotton-mills. Not long after this a wholesale batch of liberal and progressive magazines (no magazine published openly in China is more than liberal and progressive), together with a number of outspoken books, were suppressed by the authorities. This was a return to the worst days of the old reaction.

The strike was settled with unseemly haste on the part of the Chinese Government and with a callous disregard of the demands of the workers. A Japanese landing-party at Tsingtao and Japanese marines in the streets of Shanghai saw to that.

But somehow the prestige of the Nanking Government, and of the Generalissimo, survived all this with ease. An exceedingly skilful Press campaign about the Suiyuan invasions was largely responsible. Nanking in late November was full of enthusiasm for the "stiffening of policy" that was discerned in the rejection of certain Japanese overtures, and the reinforcements that were being sent to the northern front. "We will not stop with defending Suiyuan," an excited Nanking official told me after a sumptuous dinner. "We will march on into Chahar. Dolonor is our next objective. And then—the Lost Provinces?" It was a beautiful dream, too flattering sweet to be substantial. But its publicity value was enormous.

Some background to these events is necessary for any understanding of the way China reacted to the news from Sian. There had been very general protest against the arrest of the National Salvation leaders, who were eminent professional men and scholars of some distinction. The landing of Japanese marines at

Tsingtao had threatened to develop into a first-rank national crisis; but this had been successfully avoided on terms that saved the face of the Government at the expense of the Chinese workers. The Suiyuan campaign was in full swing: one heard of fresh divisions being sent to the front, of "birthday" aeroplanes that would soon fly north to meet the attack of Japanese bombers. The newspapers were full of pictures of General Fu Tso-yi, commander of the "gallant Suiyuan defenders." The gallantry of the defenders was all the more worthy of admiration as neither the reinforcements nor the aeroplanes ever reached the front.

So it is perfectly understandable that most people felt the loss or even the predicament of Chiang Kai-shek in Shensi to be a shattering blow to China. Just when the unification of the country was in sight, when the "sacred war of national defence" was being waged with real determination from Nanking, the effective head of the state had been cut off by bandits in the North-west.

"Treachery" was the mildest word that could be used to describe such an action at such a time. Nothing too bad could be said of Chang Hsueh-liang and his associates. The Generalissimo became a figure of high tragedy, if not already a martyr. What was especially praised was his courage in having ventured so boldly into this zone of disaffection in the North-west. No one was very clear as to *why* he had gone there; but everyone agreed that it showed bravery to the point of rashness.

Now rashness was the last thing of which Chiang Kai-shek had ever been accused, even by his most devoted admirers. His whole advance to power,

his consolidation of the prestige of the Nanking Government at home and abroad, had been a triumph of political shrewdness and, when necessary, utter ruthlessness. Chang Hsueh-liang, by contrast, with a reputation for irresponsibility and recklessness, was perfectly capable of acting on sudden impulse.

This striking difference between the personalities of the leading figures in the Sian drama was intriguing, and the part the Young Marshal had played was at least true to type. But why had Chiang, whose political sagacity had never yet failed him, walked so unsuspectingly into a den of vipers? It was all very well to talk of courage, now that the worst had happened. But those who knew Chiang better, spoke of miscalculation. Indiscretion was too naïve a word for the man who had broken every other rival and welded the Central Government, by bloody suppression quite as much as by smooth words, into a concrete reality.

Over the real events that had preceded the dramatic developments of the "Double Twelfth" (the current reference to "the 12th of December") hung a cloud of impenetrable mystery. So many links were missing. So many motives unclear.

In Peking, life went on much as usual. There were no meetings in the streets, no public demonstrations. Behind closed doors enthusiastic North-easterners might drink deep to the health of Chang Hsueh-liang, who had certainly gained—at least momentarily—a great deal of "face." But there was too much uncertainty for most people's liking. Rumours were everywhere, in the wine-shops and restaurants.

The most urgent question in Peking was, of course, "What will the Japanese do about it?"

But the Japanese were as nonplussed as anybody else. Officially they denounced the rising as a Communist plot, and used the Sian incident as a justification of the necessity for the recently concluded anti-Communist alliance with Germany. They were quicker off the mark than Moscow, and in China their propaganda was certainly more effective. But for the moment they were taking no chances by sudden action.

The British Embassy stood the strain nobly: this was just after the abdication of a King-Emperor, and heavy shocks were following one another at unpleasantly close intervals. As one senior member of the Service was reported to have said, "The British monarchy is tottering, the Generalissimo has been kidnapped; and what's worse, it looks as though we're going to lose the Second Test!" But, as later events proved, the British Embassy came through rather well.

I was interested in collecting local reactions. An English friend who lived in a Chinese family told me how his hostess, picking up the paper on the Sunday morning and reading the fatal headline, promptly vomited up her breakfast. This certainly showed strong emotion; but that, I felt, could still be variously interpreted.

The Chinese intellectuals, well-known scholars and "thinkers" who, more than in any other country, are looked to for guidance in times of crisis, cannot be said to have behaved with very great dignity. Perhaps the best-known of them all, an ardent advocate for many years of pacifism and reasonableness, sur-

passed all others in his rage, and demanded a punitive expedition that would reduce the rebel stronghold of Sian to dust and ashes. Many who had favoured a policy of understanding and co-operation with Japan, were implacable in their stern demands for vengeance on the Sian mutineers. None of them, it seems, made any attempt to find out what was really behind the mutiny.

By contrast, the military leaders, China's despised "war-lords," kept their heads remarkably well, perhaps because they were better informed. And the students—that fiery and volatile element, reputedly so eager to cause trouble on all occasions—held together and reserved judgment.

The people, that vast coagulate entity of China's four hundred millions, so often invoked by name and so little considered, were dumb. But they have always been dumb, and not only since the Nanking Government asserted itself. In a land where an elaborate system of characters cherished by generations of scholar-officials condemns ninety per cent of the population to illiteracy, it is not surprising that the people are inarticulate in moments of crisis. They register an opinion in China only at long intervals by movements of a blind instinctive fury, as in the days of the T'aip'ings, or in the Boxer Rising, or in the revolutionary years of 1925-27. Most of the time they merely exist.

The rumours and news reports were clearly unsatisfactory. Something was happening in Sian that we did not know enough about. And it sounded exciting. I had friends in the Shensi capital, and one of these was editor of Chang Hsueh-liang's own news-

paper. If only I could get to Sian, it might be possible to solve something of the mystery.

But how to get there? The province of Shensi is normally reached by the Lunghai railway, which cuts across the main Peking-Hankow line at Chengchow, and follows the Yellow River through a bottle-neck pass at Tungkwan. But Tungkwan was now the front of civil war. The railway and all communication by this route had already been cut, and the borders of the "rebel" province would be stiff with Government troops.

The one obvious way remaining was by air. I rang up the newspaper-man who had been with us on the day of the demonstration.

"How about flying to Sian?"

"You're telling me," he responded. "There isn't a journalist in China who wouldn't jump at the chance right now. But I've tried the Eurasia Company and offered to hire the whole plane myself—they won't look at it. They're afraid of losing the machine. You can't get to Sian by air for any money."

This sounded unpromising. Three days had passed since the coup, but the situation was as confused as ever. It had been established that Chiang was alive, but very much a prisoner. I wanted badly to get to Sian.

Late the next evening a Chinese friend telephoned to me: "Have you seen the Tass reports on Sian?" I hadn't; but they were stimulating. According to editorials in *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, the Sian rising had been engineered by the Japanese, with Wang Ching-wei (then, curiously enough, in Europe) as chief go-between. Chang Hsueh-liang had stabbed the

Nanking Government in the back just when it was preparing to resist Japan; all the talk about a United Front in his manifestoes was eyewash. As for the suggested alliance with the U.S.S.R.—this was obviously an attempt to implicate the Soviet Union in the world revolution, and emanated either from Tokio or Mexico City. The Soviet Press said many unpleasant things about the Young Marshal.

This was preposterous. If there was one impression one had of Chang Hsueh-liang, besides all the ill one had heard of him, it was that he had always been resolutely anti-Japanese. "Campaign of respectability," I suggested. "But Moscow seems to have rather overdone it. Is there any truth in this?"

My friend was a Tungpei man himself; and at the question he began to splutter, which is a thing North-easterners seldom do. "No, of course not—how can they possibly have any information from Sian? But you see what an effect this will have in China. All the liberals and progressives who were sitting on the fence and thinking about the United Front will come back again very quick on the right side. If Russia will not support this policy, who will?"

He was extremely indignant. Then, as an after-thought, he added: "Would you like to go to Sian?"

Would I like to go? It was just the thing I had been wanting to do for days. "How?"

"A friend of mine, a Tungpei man who knows Chang Hsueh-liang, is leaving tonight for Taiyuan. You know Mr. ____?" He named my friend the newspaper correspondent. "He is going too. The plan is to get in through Shansi."

If Don was going, that was fine. I knew I could get an assignment to cover the story for some English

papers, unless any other correspondents were in Sian already.

"I'm coming," I said. "Where can I meet your friend?"

He named a rendezvous. The train left in an hour.

III

WE GO TO SIAN

HE looked as though he had just come out of prison. But in China that is not so very unusual.

A slight, somehow crumpled figure, in a dark coat with a fur collar humped around his ears. He kept his hat on, even in the hotel lounge. There were lines of strain around the mouth, and his eyes wandered restlessly, fastening upon unfamiliar objects.

He smoked incessantly, with nervous gestures of his fine hands. His face was thin, and very intellectual. He had a charming smile. Rather incongruously, he wore lavender-coloured spats.

He was introduced by the name of Chou, and that was all we knew about him. That night, in spite of obvious nervous tension, he made an impression of complete indifference to personal danger. This, as we were to learn, was his most characteristic quality.

I had stuffed a few clothes—mostly woollen sweaters and heavy underwear—into a rucksack, and rolled up a pair of boots and riding-breeches in a silk-lined bedding-roll. (The last was a kind of protection against the typhus-bearing lice that are most common in North-west China during the winter months.) I thought this was travelling light, but came later to regret the amount of luggage I had with me.

We arrived at the West Station with ten minutes to

spare. The others had tickets, but I had still to buy mine. And the office was closed.

"*Mai p'iao!*!" I shouted as loud and as impressively as I could. The porter stood stolidly with my luggage on a truck. A policeman shrugged indifferently; the train was full, he said. I hammered on the second-class window. The warning bell was already sounding.

Reluctantly the window was raised, and a sleepy official gazed at me with a complete lack of interest. "No seats; too many people," he observed blandly. He took a sip of tea.

This was desperate. "What about first-class?" I demanded anxiously. He consulted his books with grave deliberation. Yes, there was one sleeper left. In a laborious, scholarly way, he filled in the check. I hardly dared wait for my change.

Somehow we found my compartment, which I shared with a fat Chinese merchant. He was already snoring vigorously in the lower berth, stripped to the waist, and looking like a sleeping Buddha. The heat in the car was overpowering.

On the platform I found Don and his friends. Chou had disappeared. The engine was hooting disconsolately.

"Well, good-bye all. . . ."

"Good-bye—we'll look for the story! And good luck!"

We felt we should need it.

The train pulled out slowly beneath the walls of Peking, dark against the snow piled at their base. Moving down the train, I found Chou standing alone on the platform of a second-class car, watching the

lights of the city fade out one by one. He looked very wistful.

"My wife is there," he said suddenly. The tone of voice made me realise that this was no pleasure trip for him. In spite of his gentle manner, this was the only time I ever heard his voice falter.

"When do you expect to see her again?"

He shrugged his thin shoulders and smiled wanly.
"Who knows? I have said good-bye."

Don came down the corridor with a large jovial person in tow. "Hullo, here you are. Who's for a drink? This is Father . . . What was the name?"

The priest beamed on us both. "Cochran—Father Cochran. I'm delighted to meet you." He was grey-haired and boyish and tremendously friendly. In the dining-car we made a strangely assorted party.

The Father belonged to an American Episcopal mission, and was returning to his station in Central China. He had travelled across Siberia, and was so full of Russia that all he wanted was an audience. Over a glass of beer he expanded magnificently.

"Those Russians have got hold of the right idea," he announced belligerently, as though he expected opposition. "I tell you, we can all learn a lot from the Soviet Union."

I caught Don's eye: this was a novel experience. I was a special correspondent (of half an hour's standing) for the London *Daily Herald*, so this should have been my meat. But a remoter connection with *The Times*, a paper on which I had once had the doubtful privilege of an office trial, was likely to be more useful in travelling towards Sian. My safest colours were imperial. Don was an American and a

real newspaper-man, so he needed convincing on any subject. We expressed polite scepticism.

But the Father had the itch to proselytise. His enthusiasm flowed like a wave. Now and again I caught Chou's eye—he was regarding this strange missionary with something like holy awe. We had introduced him as a graduate from a Mission school. It was all so unreal that I felt as though we were masqueraders at a fancy-dress ball.

"And you'd think," the good priest was saying, "that they wouldn't have much time for a man of my cloth. But I never met friendlier people. They took me to their anti-religious museums, and thought I'd be shocked." He chuckled in Chestertonian fashion. "They were the ones that were shocked, when I told them there was nothing there we wouldn't have in a good scientific exhibition in the States. They must have thought the capitalists were getting soft."

We parted from Father Cochran with regret. There are too few of his kind in China, as I was to discover later. His voice boomed down the corridor after us. ". . . And remember, boys, just because I'm in orders, I don't need to close my own eyes. Keep an open mind, I say, keep an open mind."

It was impossible to sleep in the hothouse atmosphere of that first-class compartment. About four o'clock I came out into the corridor for air; in less than an hour we would reach Shihchiachuang, which is the junction for Taiyuanfu. The train rolled along with that oscillating motion peculiar to the Peking-Hankow railway, which has been fought over and blown up so many times during civil wars that neither

the road-bed nor the rolling-stock have ever quite recovered.

The train-boy was sleeping on a folding seat at the end of the corridor. But suddenly, as if at a signal, he looked up and said "Hu To." We were crossing the river.

Below the iron girders of the bridge was the dull gleam of water. And a sickly-looking moon danced vaguely across it. The "moon in a yellow river?" Perhaps that meant something.

I got off quickly at Shihchiachuang, resenting the first-class tip demanded by the unaccustomed state in which I had travelled. At the other end of the train I found Don and Chou. The latter was shaking hands effusively with a number of fur-coated Chinese who looked important, and were obviously delighted to see him. In the background were soldiers—bodyguards—who seized our luggage and led off swiftly down the line, away from the station entrance. We vanished in a cloud of steam blown from a waiting engine.

There was something exhilarating for two foreigners about this secrecy. The others seemed more used to it; there is a perennial air of conspiracy about most Chinese politics. These men were friends of the Young Marshal, for the railway between Shihchiachuang and Paotingfu was held by North-eastern troops under General Wan Fu-lin, a former Manchurian commander with a rather doubtful reputation who was said to go around always with a revolver in one pocket and his will in another. These Tungpei men had a pathetic belief in the power of the Press, and they were only too anxious to help foreign journalists into Sian, so that their side of the story

might at least be told to the outside world. As events were to prove, they had reckoned without the power of a national censorship.

We followed our guides across the railway line and entered a dimly-lighted hotel. We were shown straight up to a room that might have belonged to a pre-Revolution Russian novel. A little brass plate on the door said "Chambre de luxe." Only the bed was Chinese, of the kind that is found in superior city brothels, with mirrors at either end. The blinds over the windows were tightly drawn.

Tea was brought, and we sat around a marble-topped table to discuss plans. Messengers came and went; maps were produced and pored over. Chou was a different man now—his eyes shone with enthusiasm, he had lost the hunted look I had first noticed in Peking. We were among friends.

The plan we agreed on was fairly simple. We would take the first train to Taiyuan, the capital of Shansi, and spend the night there. The next day we would go on down the narrow-gauge line that runs south to Tungkwan, slip the train at a little station called Ho Ma, make our way to the Yellow River that divides the provinces of Shansi and Shensi; and somehow try to get across. A message could be sent to Sian, Chou said; and across the river a car would be waiting for us. It was only a two days' run from there to Sian. At the most, we should do the trip in five days; with luck, we might do it in less.

Even so much delay was maddening, but it was the only safe route we could find. The road from the south was blocked by the Nanking troops—at any moment serious fighting might break out. This river road should still be open.

In all our plans we had to consider some uncertain factors. Shansi province has for some years now been virtually independent, under the rather less than benevolent despotism of the "Model Governor" Yen Hsi-shan. General Yen is the type of the pure individualist, so far as he is found in Chinese politics; his reputation for shrewdness and business acumen has become a legend. All through the Sian affair Yen Hsi-shan played the traditional part of middleman between the North-west and Nanking, and he probably did very well out of it. At this stage he might be regarded as a pure opportunist, with a general bias in favour of Nanking, as being ultimately the stronger side.

Personal factor number two was General Feng Ching-tsai, who held the part of Shensi province into which we should come if we succeeded in crossing the Yellow River. Feng was Yang Hu-cheng's man: that is, he had been given his first command through the grace of the Shensi leader, and by all the rules of honourable banditry he was bound to support his former chieftain. But rumour had it that Feng was wobbling. Nanking held out many inducements, for his was a key position, with command of the Tung-kwan pass and the eastern approaches to Sian. We might reach the rebel province, only to find ourselves in an outpost of Nanking. But this was a chance that had to be taken, for the only other possibility—a route by the north—meant a journey of at least a month at this time of year.

We hoped to get a better notion of how the wind lay as we travelled.

Another man had come into the room and was

talking to Chou in low tones. We caught the word aeroplane. This sounded more interesting; Chou turned to us with elation. "A plane will come tomorrow to Taiyuan—from Sian! Maybe we can find places in it to go back."

"Now that's a real idea," Don seconded heartily.
"What's it coming for?"

"North-western delegates to see Yen Hai-shan. It is a large plane, with room for six passengers."

"Can you get us into it?" I wanted to know. "Of course," Chou answered mildly. "It is Marshal Chang's plane."

If this arrangement worked out, we might be in Sian the next day. It looked as though we really were in luck.

The branch line from Shihchiachuang to Taiyuan is run by a French company. It is a pleasant little railway, with iron spikes, like *chevaux de frise*, along the roofs of the tiny station buildings. We installed ourselves and our luggage with some difficulty in a diminutive second-class compartment, most of which was filled by a large wooden table. The window—a nice French touch—was decorated with a true-love knot and a little cluster of rose-buds painted on the glass.

Don and I did most of the talking, for our companion wished to make himself as unobtrusive as possible. The train-boy, I was delighted to find, said "*Oui*" and "*Non*" with a perfect Parisian accent. Unfortunately, his French did not carry beyond this.

The platform, like all railway platforms in China, was crowded with soldiers and police. "They all know me," whispered Chou from his corner. I won-

dered again who he was, this slim, youthful North-easterner with his slightly haggard air, whose eyes—the eyes of a dreamer, perhaps of a fanatic—crinkled so readily into a smile. Perhaps it was better that we did not know.

Just before the train started, a curious group of young Chinese appeared, with an enormous silk banner, which they carried with exaggerated care into the next compartment. There were four men who looked like clerks or students, and a couple of girls in slacks, with short hair. We discovered later that they were a delegation from the South on their way to Suiyuan, taking their banner and a substantial supply of foodstuffs to the gallant defenders of the nation. They were from Canton, and most of their conversation was unintelligible. But the girls were charming.

At last we were away, with that familiar view of city walls and a cracked pagoda rising above them that one sees leaving almost any country station in China. We shared the compartment at first with a plain-clothes policeman, which might have been awkward. But he slept an apparently guileless sleep most of the way. We talked to one another in English, which was fairly safe: Don and Chou talked Japanese, which was safer. It was an uneventful journey.

At Nian Tze Kwan, the mountain pass leading into Shansi, the train climbs a river-bed between towering cliffs. Here we watched the Great Wall come into sight—a line of masonry curved along the shoulder of the hills, with fortresses that cut the sky. Far below, the snow-water ran green against the rocks. We swung out across a high bridge, with the cliffs sheer in face; a wireless mast, and the tiny figures of soldiers, seemed sketched in ink along their

summit. Across the bridge, we were in Shansi.

This is the coal country that the Japanese covet, where the very rail-bed is dark with lignite. The loess hills rise in terraces from the river valley, yellow villages cluster like forts along the rising levels. It is a bare province in winter, but the form of the hills is precise and beautifully moulded, as in a landscape by Paul Nash. The peasant-clothes are black, so that the figures of men stand out in sharp relief against the dun-coloured fields and hills. This is the real Northwest, the land of the yellow earth.

It was growing dark as we ran in towards Taiyuan, across an open plain swept by a bitter wind. The snow lay piled in drifts beside the line. The party from Canton were fascinated by it; they had never seen snow before, and seized every minute's halt at a wayside station to bombard each other with snow-balls. They still did not believe that it was true.

All that we saw of Taiyuan was the railway station, bristling with guards; and an open square beside it, loud with the evening clamour of blackbirds. The Grand Hotel de Shansi is like a relic from the last century, with its faded curtains and enormous vaulted rooms. We dined in a *salle-à-manger* that you might have found in a French province. A little man with ragged hair and a black moustache, like a character in a René Clair film, was moodily drinking absinthe at the next table.

Our spirits soared. Chou had done some detective work on the hotel register, and announced that the plane had certainly arrived, as two of the North-eastern delegates had just left for Peking. The problem was, how to connect with it.

The room the three of us shared was my idea of a cardinal's suite. The floor was paved with dark red tiles, and the ceiling was lost in shadows. There was a roomy, if antique, bathroom; and Chou announced his intention of taking a bath. He said it was soothing. Don had gone out to look up a friend and gather news.

The police had not yet come to examine our passports, and I was thinking out a good story to tell them—one that would account for our Chinese travelling companion—when Chou himself emerged mysteriously from the bathroom and came very close to me. "I want to ask your advice," he said.

He looked very youthful, with shirt unbuttoned and damp hair falling over his forehead. It was hard to realise that he had a wife and an eight-year-old daughter.

I said he was very welcome to my advice, for what it was worth. But I was hardly prepared for what came next.

"Shall I go tonight to see Yen Hsi-shan?" he asked me. "I think, if I can see him, I can persuade him to join with our movement in Sian."

This sounded very optimistic to me. I knew Yen's reputation; he was not likely to be very susceptible to persuasion without a definite *quid pro quo*. Chou did not know Yen personally, but had an introduction to one of his secretaries.

But this was not all. For when I asked one question, the whole story came out.

Chou was a hunted man, with a price on his head. He had been a secretary to Chang Hsueh-liang, and had lived with him in Sian during the last two

years. He belonged to a younger group of Tungpei "radicals" who had been very active in the months before the rising of the "Double Twelfth." He himself, after the Generalissimo's first visit to Sian in October of that year, had been indiscreet enough to attack Chiang openly. This was at the Tungpei Military Academy.

(I remembered a story I had heard in Shanghai about this famous meeting of Tungpei cadets. The Young Marshal had ordered the arrest of the speaker, who had escaped from Sian without much difficulty. That man's name was Miao Chien-ch'iu; he had been widely charged since then, in all the Chinese newspapers, as one of the most dangerous ringleaders of the mutiny. In Peking, and over all China, the police were looking for him. This, then . . . ?)

He tapped his nose with one finger and said simply: "I am Miao."

This was a complication. It was obviously extremely risky for our friend to be in Taiyuan at that moment, or in any other place except Sianfu. It was plain madness for him to go to see Yen Hsi-shan. He was too well known. Any detective or official might recognise him. And his presence in our company was, to say the least of it, embarrassing.

We had liked him at once, though we had seen that he was impulsive and highly strung. I learned to know him better in the days that followed, and to liking was added both admiration and respect. Whatever one might think of his judgement, he was transparently honest and sincere.

The newspapers called him a Communist; but no one could ever have believed this who knew him.

The one thing his mind had never submitted to was discipline. He was a native revolutionist, of the type of Sun Yat-sen himself — chaotic, temperamental, completely indifferent to money or position. Educated in Japan and speaking Japanese perfectly, he had the true North-easterner's passionate resentment against Japan for the Manchurian invasion. The war with Japan, the recovery of the "lost territories" where he had been born, were all he lived for. And he might not live so very much longer, it seemed, unless he could get to Sian.

With some difficulty I managed to persuade him not to go out in search of Yen Hsi-shan. He debated this hotly, having great faith in his gift of oratory. I was more concerned for his own safety; for I knew that any offers to Yen that would mean anything must already have been made. I did not trust this sacrificial mood.

Finally he went off to take another bath, as his nerves were badly frayed. I found out later that this was a regular habit of his.

Don came back with the news that the plane returning to Sian the next day would be filled with Yen's own delegates. And that there was a regiment of troops guarding the airfield. I told him about Miao.

"Christ, these Chinese patriots!" he groaned. "Why the hell couldn't he keep his mouth shut? We can't possibly go on with him now that we know who he is."

It was worse for Don than for me, because his Press agency could hardly risk trouble with Nanking; and so far, Miao had been travelling as his secretary.

There seemed to be nothing for it but to split the party. A gurgle of water from the bathroom reminded us that our revolutionary friend would soon be with us again. And we had to decide something.

"I'll stick with Miao," I said. "After all, it's the best chance of getting through. And he isn't safe alone."

. "All right, that's your funeral. Now we'd better work things out a bit."

Miao rejoined us in chastened mood. Behind locked doors we held an urgent council of war. It was clearly unsafe for him to stay in Taiyuan; there might be trouble with the police at any moment. On the other hand, I did not want to set out on the "long route" across the Yellow River if there was still the chance of a plane direct to Sian. In Shihchiachuang, with the Tungpei men, Miao was safe; and we could communicate with the "rebels."

We finally agreed that Don should stay on in Taiyuan, his friend and secretary being called back on urgent business. Later he could try to get through on his own via Tungkwan. In Shihchiachuang, Miao and I would see what could be done.

It was late before we had talked this all out; and Miao had not slept for several days. There had been too much excitement for all of us, in this vaguely sinister hotel where anything might happen. Don and I spent the rest of the night in uneasy suspense, waiting for a knock upon the door.

IV

NORTH-EASTERN

IT was a raw, cold morning when Miao and I slipped out of the hotel and made our way across to the station. We had been in Taiyuan a bare twelve hours, and we were already beating a retreat.

Miao bought the tickets, for now he had become my secretary, and I had to affect a complete ignorance of Chinese. This gave us the chance of stalling for a while, if there should be any trouble. He was nervous and preoccupied; it was obviously on his conscience that he had failed to convert Yen Hsi-shan to the cause of the Young Marshal.

We travelled first-class, in order to be alone. I sat in my corner and tried to look as arrogant as possible; I discovered that I could quell curious police or guards with a look. There are certain advantages about being a foreigner in China.

That was the longest train journey I ever made in my life. As an experience it was interesting, for it is not every day that one travels with a revolutionary. And I knew enough of the Chinese "terror"—which has been little publicised, though in certain features Dachau and Oranienburg are mild beside it—to realise what awaited my friend if he were caught. The suspicion of "communism" would be enough, in a country where Communists are called "bandits"

and treated as such. If I could help it, Miao was not going to be handed over to the Blue Shirts.

We talked with hardly a break, for it passed the time; and there were many things I wanted to know. I questioned him about Sian, about the Young Marshal, about the North-eastern Army. He had worked with Chang Hsueh-liang, and knew him intimately. What was most important, he had known him in the last years at Sian.

I wanted a picture of the North-eastern background; and from Miao I got it, with all the dramatic point of high causes at stake. The full tragedy of Manchuria is little realised, even in China. The very word Tungpei—"North-eastern"—has different connotations. For many Chinese it means only a truculent minority of exiles who are not at home in China-south-of-the-Wall; who have difficulty in finding a living, and are unnecessarily quarrelsome about it. To these people the word "Tungpei" is a reproach; they have very little feeling for the appalling conditions under which the millions of Chinese who remain in Manchuria now live. But the Tungpei men in exile, the old Manchurian army and the many who have found life impossible under the five-barred flag of "Manchukuo," look back to their north-eastern homeland with bitterness and a rising indignation. They are the irredentists, the most implacably anti-Japanese element in all China; and their constant effort has been to make their own struggle the struggle of the Chinese nation.

Miao had a deplorable habit, common to many Chinese who have been trained as scholars, of writing as he talked. This trick alone would have convinced me that he was not a Communist; I watched

the pen travel smoothly over the paper with misgivings. It was a kind of emotional release for him, but a source of endless anxiety to me, when at any moment a detective might come into the carriage. As each sheet was covered, I leant across the table, tore it off the block, and crumpled it into my pocket. By the time we reached Shihchiachuang I was a walking waste-paper basket.

But from this curious conversation a clear story began to emerge. There have been many unflattering portraits of Chang Hsueh-liang. But to understand the man, his political development and the new policy he advocated for China after the Sian mutiny, it is very necessary to try to see him as his own people see him, who know both his strength and weakness. If only by the accident of birth, he has taken a prominent part in the forefront of the Chinese scene during the last ten years. Here is an account of some of those years, leading up to the latest phase.

In a pavilion by the old South Lake of Peking that had once been the pleasure-garden of emperors, Chang Hsueh-liang awoke on his twenty-eighth birthday. He was young, care-free, irresponsible—the playboy son of an irascible war-lord father. The “Old Marshal” Chang Tso-lin, who by a real talent for leadership and intrigue had asserted his iron control over the whole of Manchuria, but was always less successful in his manœuvres south of the Wall, had left for Mukden the day before, warned off by the northward progress of the Nationalist armies. He never reached home.

About nine o’clock on that morning of June 6th,

1928, the telegram arrived. White pigeons were wheeling above the lake, filling the air with the plaintive note of the tiny clay flutes bound around their necks, as the son read the news. The care-free years were over.

Four hours earlier, as the Old Marshal's train crossed a bridge on the Japanese-owned railway near Mukden, a bomb had exploded above his private car. The Japanese drive for Manchuria had entered a new phase.

That afternoon the Young Marshal left for the North. Few people noticed his departure; the news of Chang Tso-lin's death was so closely guarded that not even the Japanese knew whether the plot had succeeded or not. Chang Hsueh-liang was in Mukden; the army command had been recalled from North China, before the Old Marshal's death was announced. Japanese diplomacy, alert as ever to press an advantage, found itself baulked in the moment when it had least expected opposition. It had to contend with a new ruler—less experienced by far than the last, less adroit in the exchange of confidences, a youth with a name for recklessness who was by no means master in his own house—but a ruler who would not be bullied and could not be bribed.

This is ancient history by now, but recent events have recalled the incident. At the time, many people were uncertain as to who had contrived the assassination—it might as well have been the Nationalists as the Japanese. Chang Hsueh-liang had no doubts about the matter from the first: he suspected his father's Chief of Staff, a certain General Yang Yu-t'ing, who was in open association with the Japanese,

and an old enemy of his own. Despite the Young Marshal's Western clothes and racing motor-cars, he was only one generation removed from the Manchurian plainland. The primitive duty of avenging a father's death was to loom larger with the years.

Picturesque details of the Young Marshal's youthful indiscretions are not wanting. He was the Orient's Prince Carol for so long that few people even today ever think of him as anything else. But his early career is not without interest.

He once wanted to be a scholar (he had been privately educated), and for a short period, in Peking, began attendance at the National University, then the home of the May Fourth movement, and the most revolutionary intellectual centre in China. But the Old Marshal would have none of that, and haled him back to Mukden to the Military Academy. The son of Chang Tso-lin must be a soldier.

Young Chang entered the army as a cadet. Promotion—as was to be expected—came easily to him, but not without some justification. He was quick, intelligent, and incurably friendly. At this time in Mukden he had a number of friends among the foreign missionaries, and he was an active member of the Y.M.C.A. Strenuous efforts were made to convert him to Christianity; and Chang himself, who adopted so many Western ways, was not disinclined to accept a Western religion. It is interesting to speculate what results such a conversion might have had. The tactic, among Chinese leaders, has not been unsuccessful.

The young colonel who passed out from the Mukden Academy was soon given practical military

experience in the interminable civil wars that devastated North China during the 'twenties—troubled waters in which Chang Tso-lin fished at his peril. His closest friends in the army seem to have been two North-eastern commanders of notably different personal reputation, by name Kuo Sun-ling and Hai Lin-chun. Kuo was apparently an efficient soldier, and was one of the first generals to undertake the re-organisation of the Tungpei army. He was older than Chang, but became an intimate personal friend, and appears to have been something of a Bayard. Unfortunately, Kuo was involved with that most versatile figure of Chinese politics, the "Christian general" Feng Yu-hsiang, in a revolt against the autocratic Old Marshal late in 1925. He was captured and executed, despite young Chang's pleas for his life.

With the Good Angel removed, the Dark Angel took his place. Hai Lin-chun—another commander of real ability—was a much more reckless companion. He and Chang Hsueh-liang campaigned together, unsuccessfully, in Honan in 1926. One sequel to the campaign was a serious attempt, led by the reactionary Yang Yu-t'ing (later suspected in connection with the assassination of the Old Marshal), to discredit the son in the eyes of his father. Young Chang almost lost his command—he was by now a brigadier-general—and did not dare see his father for months.

But a more unfortunate sequel to the Honan campaign was that at this time, with his friend Hai, Chang first learnt to take opium. He soon realised the danger of the habit; but, in his efforts to effect a "cure" under unskilful medical direction, Chang developed an addiction to morphine and other sedative drugs.

It was this period of drug-taking that established firmly the Young Marshal's reputation for weakness and instability. Had he become a Christian instead of an opium-addict, it is possible that the history of Manchuria might have been very different.

When Chang Hsueh-liang returned to Mukden after his father's death, his own position was still undefined. He had been Commander of the Third and Fourth North-eastern Armies; and by the Provincial Assembly he was given the title of Pacification Commissioner of the three North-eastern Provinces. But with his patrimony, he inherited from his father certain unspecified commitments to Japan. And one very powerful group of senior officials and advisers, headed by the old enemy Yang Yu-t'ing, and his closest associate, a certain Chang Ying-huai, were openly in favour of "independence" for Manchuria and co-operation with Japan. It was a clear choice between Nanking and Tokio. The Young Marshal did not hesitate.

He was heartily sick of Chinese civil wars, and genuinely believed that the North-eastern provinces were a part of China which should be brought into close connection with the Central Government. By way of encouragement, Nanking conferred on him the title of Governor of the North-eastern Borders. Yang Yu-t'ing and his group were in favour of continuing the war in North China, where Feng Yu-hsiang, Yen Hsi-shan, and the discredited Wang Ching-wei still held out against the Nationalists in a rather shaky triumvirate. But Chang Hsueh-liang made it clear that he was for internal unity rather than internal strife, and gave some point to this by

moving his Manchurian troops down to Peking and Tientsin. The resistance in the North collapsed, and a grateful Government made the young North-eastern leader second-in-command of the Sea, Land, and Air Forces of the Republic.

On December 29th, 1928, after considerable opposition from the reactionaries strongly backed by the Japanese, the old five-barred flag that has since become the emblem of "Manchukuo" was formally changed throughout Manchuria to the Nationalist flag of Sun Yat-sen. The white sun on a blue ground of the Kuomintang flew over the whole North-east.

But over one gate in Mukden the five-coloured flag of Yuan Shih-k'ai's vanished empire was still displayed. This was at the home of the leader of the "pro-Japanese" group, General Yang Yu-t'ing, "First Man of Manchuria" in his own style, and now the most influential and reactionary of all the Old Marshal's former advisers. It was the sign of an opposition still active and still powerful.

The old reactionary group had always treated Chang the younger as a child, to be surrounded with the pleasures of living and kept, if possible, politically impotent. This was a conventional piece of palace-intrigue, and in the past it had worked fairly successfully. But the young ruler was old enough now to know his own mind, and he had very definite ideas about policy. He had challenged the reaction from the start, over the issue of union with Nanking. Now the war of two factions was carried into questions of the internal development of Manchuria.

Chang's programme was really progressive and at once encountered opposition. He encouraged immigration into the North-eastern provinces, and laid

especial emphasis on developing industry and communications. The great Mukden Arsenal was extended until it was the finest in the Far East. The Young Marshal's idea was to make it "productive," an industrial centre that would turn out automobiles and aeroplanes. The army was reorganised, until it was the best-equipped and best-trained in China. And an immense project for the development of transportation was entered upon.

Transportation, Chang argued, was the key to the whole economic position in Manchuria. Excluding the Chinese Eastern Railway (in which, since 1924, China had nominally a half-interest with Soviet Russia), more than 70 per cent of the railways in Manchuria were owned by the Japanese. The Young Marshal determined to break this monopoly of foreign control by building Chinese railways in competition with the Japanese. Japan protested vigorously, and produced a secret protocol by which such action was prohibited. Disputes over the railways gave rise to a series of disturbing incidents. Not only was there trouble with Japan: there was also trouble with Japan's Manchurian allies.

For Yang Yu-t'ing had civil authority over the Arsenal; and his working partner Chang Ying-huai was Minister of Communications.

There were other causes of friction. The Young Marshal was a firm believer in the encouragement of education—a point in his favour that has to be conceded even by his detractors. Education is always a safe political card; but Chang really played it, setting aside large sums of money from his father's fortune for the establishment of a North-eastern University at Mukden, and for the founding of primary and

middle schools throughout the country. No doubt he enjoyed the picture of himself as a beneficent and enlightened patron of learning. But he was genuinely indignant when he learnt that, of one instalment of five million dollars intended as a grant for education, three millions had gone into the pocket of the wily Yang, who put them into mining investments. This was in the best traditions of Chinese officialdom, but it was a dangerous game for Yang to play just at that moment. Young Chang could still be, at times, the son of his father.

The time had come for a show-down. When Yang Yu-t'ing's venerable father celebrated a birthday in Mukden in more than Oriental splendour, the young Governor Chang Hsueh-liang was the most polite and deferential of all the guests. Two days later, Yang Yu-t'ing and Chang Ying-huai were both invited to a banquet in the Young Marshal's home. Their host excused himself, delicately fingering a handkerchief. Guards broke into the room, and the two guests were summarily shot.

This picturesque incident was recalled at the time of the capture of Chiang Kai-shek in Sian. Many people believed that he had received the same kind of hospitality.

There is a well-authenticated story that on the night before this banquet in Mukden, Chang Hsueh-liang tossed up a coin to decide whether to have his enemies killed or not. The coin was a Yuan Shih-k'ai silver dollar, bearing on one side the image of that Caesar-minded statesman. "Heads" (or Yuan shih-k'ai) "they die," said the Young Marshal. Yuan Shih-k'ai came up. Still uncertain, Chang tossed again. Again it was "heads."

"What *are* you doing?" asked his wife from the other end of the room.

"I'm tossing up whether to kill Yang and Chang," her husband replied. "It's come heads twice already."

Somewhat shocked, Madame Chang insisted that he must toss at least a third time to make sure. This time, tails would win.

Chang tossed. Yuan Shih-k'ai went down. That settled it.

The lone silver dollar was honourably installed as a memento in a large money-chest in Chang's private quarters. When Mukden was sacked by the Japanese after September 18th, 1931, the home of the Young Marshal was naturally expected to yield a rich haul. The private fortune of the Changs was fabulous.

Soldiers discovered this money-chest with the liveliest expectations. On opening it, their surprise at the meagre spoils it contained was considerable.

What the Japanese did with the silver dollar is not told. But if Chang Hsueh-liang had still had it in his possession in Sian five years later, it is unlikely that he would have used it again to toss for the life of Chiang Kai-shek. That was a different Chang Hsueh-liang.

The brief period of the Young Marshal's rule in Manchuria is more familiar ground. He kept to his policy of internal peace and union with the Nanking Government (to which he always referred the Japanese in matters of foreign policy); and continued with the economic programme of "squeezing-out" Japan, building railways furiously. The patience of the Japanese expansionists, notably General Honjo of

the Kwantung garrison, was at length exhausted. On September 18th, 1931, Japan struck. There was only a tragic mockery of resistance.

The failure of the Tungpei army—so immeasurably superior in numbers and resources to the small but determined attacking force—is usually explained as the failure of its commander, Chang Hsueh-liang. At the time of the Mukden incident Chang was in Peking, with the greater part of his army south of the Wall. He had come to the rescue of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nanking Government when Feng Yu-hsiang and Yen Hsi-shan once more raised the banner of revolt in the North. In occupying Peking, Chang Hsueh-liang was following again his avowed policy of preserving the unity of China and preventing civil war. There could be no question, at this time, of his loyalty to Chiang Kai-shek. It was a loyalty that cost him—and China—Manchuria.

When the Japanese struck so suddenly at Mukden, Chang was still in the Rockefeller hospital at Peking, recovering from an attack of typhoid from which he very nearly died. (This illness has been questioned, as a mere blind for a prolonged spell of drug-taking; but its seriousness may be confirmed from the records of the hospital, which are certainly reliable.) The day after the incident, Chang returned home from the hospital: but he was far from well in the months that followed—months of catastrophe that sealed the fate of the North-eastern provinces. Later, he was to blame himself bitterly for his indecision in this period.

Tungpei men always speak of September 18th as the “day of betrayal”; they are not so resentful against their young commander as towards some

others. They claim that Chang Hsueh-liang was only obeying the instructions he received from Nanking—to avoid resistance, as an intensification of the crisis, and await the decision of the World Powers as invoked under the Kellogg Pact and the Nine-Power Treaty. This was the policy advocated by Chiang Kai-shek, whose motives are perhaps more open to question than the Young Marshal's. There is good reason to believe that Chang Hsueh-liang himself at first interpreted the events of that September as just another "incident," like the Japanese occupation of Tsinan in 1916, and—like this—open to settlement by arbitration. His support of Nanking involved him in Nanking's policy of surrender.

The only effective opposition offered by China to Japanese aggression in recent years has been in defiance of the High Command. In January of the next year, the 19th Route Army at Chapei proved to the world that Chinese troops are, man for man, at least a match for the Japanese. But the 19th Route Army was recalled by the same order that had "avoided a crisis" four months before and lost Manchuria. And the story of Jehol a year later is even more tragically clear.

After the loss of the North-eastern provinces, the defence of Jehol became a matter of national honour. Leadership of the defence was entrusted to the notorious Tang Yu-lin, whose "record retreat" with his opium-bales loaded on military trucks has become a bitter theme for Chinese ironists. The whole crushing *débâcle* of Jehol was a final exposure of the "policy" of Nanking. "Non-resistance" or "resistance with diplomacy" had officially been abandoned; Chiang Kai-shek had announced his readiness to

"make the supreme sacrifice" in defence of North China. Nearly half a million Government troops, according to the War Minister, Ho Ying-chin, were engaged at this time in fighting the "Communist bandits" in the interior of China; repeatedly the Communist authorities had offered a truce in order to strengthen the resistance to Japan. But no reinforcements were sent to the North; and when the Japanese attack came in February 1933, the defence crumpled up so pitifully that by March 4th the invaders were in Jehol City.

The position of Chang Hsueh-liang at this time is interesting. He was in Peking, with some 40,000 North-eastern troops inside Jehol under Tang Yu-lin's command, and the rest mobilised north of Peking and along the railway north towards Shanhaikwan. Any faith Chang might once have had in the League of Nations, or in the power of right against might, had long since vanished. After the first defeat, according to his own people, he wanted to take command of the whole army, move into Jehol, and fight.

But at this time Chiang Kai-shek paid a secret visit to Paotingfu, where a hurried council was held. In describing the plight of China, the Generalissimo used the familiar parable of the ship of state that had struck a rock. "The cargo is too heavy; some of the ballast must go overboard if the ship is to be saved." Chang Hsueh-liang, it appeared, was the ballast. He sent in a rather pathetic letter of resignation, drafted in the Generalissimo's private car at Paoting: "... Events have now occurred which lead me, after consultation with General Chiang Kai-shek, definitely to believe that my resignation at this moment would be a service to the Central Government and

thereby strengthen it. . . . In thus leaving I hope my countrymen will believe in the sincerity of my motives for doing so, and will realise that whatever may be my faults of commission or omission, I have striven to work for the welfare of my country." Command of the Tungpei army passed to the Generalissimo; it was promptly sent south to Honan, and Chang Hsueh-liang went abroad for his health. From the point of view of power politics, Chiang's handling of the North-eastern problem was masterly. From that time until the Sian mutiny, his reputation grew steadily and without a check. Chang Hsueh-liang's, it seemed, was broken for ever.

In 1933 we take our leave of the "Young Marshal," so familiar to the Far Eastern columns of the World Press—the sallow-faced, sad-eyed drug-addict whose portrait gazed gloomily from the front pages of so many newspapers in the days after the "Double Twelfth." The legend lived on; even in China it survives. The man who had lost a northern empire would find it difficult to be popular in his own country.

Before he went abroad, Chang Hsueh-liang spent two months in Shanghai undergoing a strenuous opium "cure." He was helped in this by foreign friends, especially his former adviser, W. H. Donald, who was to play a friendly part again in the Sian negotiations. The treatment was successful; and the months abroad completed the cure. Chang returned from his exile a different man.

The story of Manchuria has never yet been told in full. It is only in the years since then that the world has begun to realise how much was lost in those September days. Abyssinia opened the eyes of many;

the measure of general awareness today may be read in the panic of chancelleries, subscribed by the metal signature of armaments. Collective security was a fair phrase in 1931. Now we do not even hear it.

Between the lines of that precise and diplomatic document, the Lytton Report, may be read the tragedy of the North-eastern people. (Another report should be compiled, telling the story of what has since happened to those Chinese who were indiscreet enough to give evidence before the Lytton Commission.) Not the least part in that tragedy belongs to the Tungpei army, withdrawn from its homeland without the chance to offer resistance. But against the background of "North-eastern"—the land of White Mountains and Black Rivers, as the Tungpei men love to call it—the drama is not yet played out. For at least, in these bitter years, it has found its hero.

He was foreshadowed, perhaps, by that wiry little horseman General Ma Chan-shan, whose gallant resistance to the invaders in frozen Tsitsihar stirred the imagination of the world. But he has since become the theme of some of the best modern writing in China; you will see him in his fur cap, rifle black against the snow, in any exhibition of modern painting or woodcuts by the young Shanghai artists whom Lu Hsun used to praise. He is not yet the Red Guard of the Chinese Revolution. He is the Manchurian Volunteer.

It was dark again when we reached Shihchiachuang. All our days seemed to close with a night arrival at a guarded station. We made our way back to the familiar hotel with a feeling of hopelessness. Sian seemed further off than ever.

From our room on the first floor, as we came into it, we heard the sound of marching. Miao followed me to the window. Dark against the pale glow of the lamps, a body of grey-clad soldiers were marching back to barracks. As they passed, they broke into a patriotic song—clear, staccato, but somehow strangely nostalgic.

"That is the Tungpei army," Maio said behind me. I knew what he was thinking.

That night we spent many hours discussing plans. There was still the chance of a plane, if we could only make the connection at Taiyuan. But it would take at least a day to get a reply from Sian.

One man stayed late in our rooms that night. I never knew who he was; but he was a Manchurian, with the broad head and wide high cheek-bones of the North. And he had written a new "Tungpei" song.

He sang it for us, very softly in the darkened room. It was a song I was to hear often in the days that followed. It began:

My home is in far Heilungkiang
Beyond the Sungari.
There is the little house, the fields I knew,
The corn, and beans, and kaoliang. . . .

Then it told of "chiu yi pa," the day of betrayal; of the sufferings of the peasants under the Japanese, and of the longing of the exile to return:

Father, mother,
Little brother, little sister,
When shall we meet again?
What year? What month? What day
Shall we be together again in one small room?

Chinese takes sentiment more gracefully than English. But Miao was fascinated by the song, and the two of them spent hours singing it over together so that he might learn it. At last he knew it by heart, words and music—it had a mournful, elaborate, but rather beautiful tune. The other man slipped out into the darkness.

Miao turned to me; his eyes were moist. "When we get to Sian, I will sing this song to General Chiang Kai-shek—and he cannot choose but weep. Then, I think, his heart will be changed."

I wondered.

V

YELLOW RIVER

A DAY later we made our second start from Shihchia-chuang. "They must be getting to know us pretty well on this line," I remarked as we took the morning train again for Taiyuan. Miao grinned cheerfully: two nights' sleep had worked wonders with him.

"They think you are a very important person," he said, "with much business to attend to. You are a foreigner, you travel First-class. You have a secretary. Very much 'face'." I hoped he was right. To the simple Western mind, our movements in the last three days must have looked definitely suspicious.

But we were not going to Taiyuan. A message had come from Don the day before, saying that he had not been able to get a place in the plane for Sian, so was going on by train to Tungkwan, hoping to make his way through the lines there. That was the last we heard of him for nearly two months. I learnt when I got back to Peking that he had been unable to make any impression on the Nanking troops at the border, had returned, and been ill for weeks with something that sounded ominously like typhus. We were slower off the mark; but we had better luck (as it proved) than anyone else.

Our plan was to slip the train a couple of stations before Taiyuan, which—discreet inquiries had con-

firmed—was by no means a healthy place for my friend Miao. If another plane could come from Sian, a message would be waiting for us there. And if that failed, we would go on the same night by the slow train to Ho Ma, and strike out for the Yellow River.

The journey we had made three times in as many days was distressingly familiar. But it passed off without incident. Another friend was travelling with us in the Third-class. He would give us the signal to alight.

Late that afternoon Miao, who had been sitting with his nose pressed to the glass of the carriage-window, looked across to me and said "Next stop." We had booked for Taiyuan, and the train-boy was very astonished when we began to gather our luggage. A two-dollar bill satisfied his curiosity.

The train drew into a little station guarded only by sleepy-looking policemen. We got off hastily, and at once crossed the line, where we piled our bags and waited till the train moved on. The mysterious friend appeared suddenly with two railway workers.

"Come on," he said briefly. We followed the group along a siding until we came to a railway jigger standing deserted beside the points. All climbed aboard; the railwaymen bent to the levers. The points clicked, and we slid away silently into the dusk.

It was bitterly cold. We sat upon the narrow boards with our teeth chattering; I had not the faintest idea where we were going. The wind blew straight from the mountains, and we envied the two men working rhythmically behind us. It seemed an age before the truck left the line and turned into a factory yard. Steel gates clanged-to behind us. And everyone breathed more easily.

In the little house where we were welcomed, a shallow charcoal brazier gave the only heat. The two rooms were full of children who had never seen a foreigner before, and were paralysed with shyness when I spoke to them in Mandarin, which they did not understand. An old wrinkled mother-in-law was puffing at a country pipe. The house was bare, but scrupulously clean, by any Chinese standards short of the New Life Movement.

Food was brought to us—steaming mien, and knuckle-bones, and even rice in our honour. This kind of hospitality, I realised suddenly, was worth a great deal more than some of the rich official feasts I had been offered in large cities. The cost of a Chinese feast in Shanghai or Nanking would have fed this family for a year.

It was a pleasant interlude, that evening in a worker's cottage. By the time I had priced every article of my clothing, bared a hairy forearm to the entranced gaze of the younger children, and drunk innumerable bowls of coarse-flavoured tea (offered with endless apologies), our friend had returned with news. There had been fighting near Sian; the plane could not come. We must push on by the night train.

He was a resourceful person, this friend who seemed to know everybody. Before we left he had produced food—biscuits and powdered beef—for the journey. Also, rather surprisingly, he produced a servant. We must have at least one, he said, for reasons of "face"; and he would be useful.

The servant was a hatchet-faced Northerner, formerly a soldier in the Tungpei army, who had been "lent" by friends in the village. His name was Li, and he would go with us to Sian. I liked the freemasonry

of this arrangement. Chinese are much less possessive about their servants than Westerners. But then, in China, most foreigners who run a Chinese establishment are possessed by their cook or their Number One Boy. They are tyrannised by a system in which Chinese move with ease.

We could pick up the slow train to Tungkwan at a neighbouring station. We piled our belongings into rickshaws; were farewelled with exquisite politeness. Li led off into the darkness. We must travel across-country, and there was not the faintest glimmer of a moon. In the rickshaw ahead of me Miao was singing to himself, "My home is beyond the Sungari. . . ."

Dogs barked as we passed noiselessly through the deserted village and out into the open fields. Grave-mounds loomed on either side of the narrow path. In the distance a train whistled mournfully. The real journey, I felt, had at last begun.

We stood in the draughty waiting-room and froze. I was at least moderately well equipped for this kind of travel, with high boots and a Mongolian fur cap. Miao, like a correctly dressed secretary, in his dark suit and the fantastic spats, hunched up in his over-coat like a ruffled thrush and shifted from one foot to the other. Li, in a padded cotton coat and an old pair of leather city shoes that must once have belonged to his master, should have been the coldest of the three. But he gave no signs of it beyond thrusting his hands into his sleeves and looking rather truculent.

When the train arrived, it was crowded as only a country "slow" in China can be. We forced our way through an ill-fitting door into a dark little carriage, with three wooden seats running lengthwise along it. The walls were of twisted boards, with the worst gaps

patched on the inside with sacking. There were two unimpressive stoves, one at either end; and a solitary oil-lamp. Clearly, we were in for an uncomfortable night.

By superior scrum-tactics we managed to occupy a place in the middle of the centre seat, which was as far away from the stoves as one could be. Miao piled the parcels of food between us in recognised Chinese style, which is always to take up as much seat-room as you can get. Very cleverly he produced a candle, which he mounted on the corner of a biscuit-tin. Li preferred to stand beside the stove, which he filled up from time to time from the exiguous stock of coal on the floor beside it, making rude remarks about the stinginess of the Shansi railways. "Yen Hsi-shan does well out of travellers," Miao remarked through chattering teeth. "You see, everything in Shansi is run for profit."

That was one of the coldest nights I ever spent in my life. The train rumbled along southwards, making interminable halts at small stations. The wind whistled a dirge through the carriage-walls. Every few minutes a peasant would get up and go to the stove, to warm his feet or his hands. Our fellow-travellers had lost any special interest in us; we were reduced to a common level of cold and discomfort.

But even this was not destined to endure without interruption. At a brief halt about midnight, there was a sudden commotion outside the door, which flew open violently. Two soldiers in sheepskins entered abruptly, and—with scant courtesy to its befuddled occupants—cleared a space on the seat

directly opposite us. A large figure in a fur-lined greatcoat filled the doorway.

Miao gave the newcomer one swift look and whispered to me, "Nanking!" He turned up the collar of his own coat and pulled his hat down over his eyes until he looked like a film conspirator. The officer, who was a large red-faced man carrying a black despatch-case, must certainly be on important business, to be travelling at this hour on a local train.

He was a colonel, I noticed; and he had a number of suitcases with him. One of these was placed on the seat, and a lighted candle attached to it carefully by a soldier. With a groan, the new arrival stretched himself full length (the only traveller who could permit himself such luxury) and made a pillow of the despatch-case. From his pocket he produced a folded newspaper. He studied this carefully by the light of the candle.

Miao had taken the first chance to shift across to the stove, and huddled over it with his face in shadow. A little later I joined him.

"What do you think of our military friend?" I asked. The clatter of the train muffled our conversation.

He smiled ruefully. "He is reading about me, in that newspaper," he replied. "Perhaps he is going to Tungkwan. He may be a Special Messenger."

"Can he possibly recognise you?"

"I think not. But I am not happy."

Neither was I.

The colonel finished with his paper, and gave a long look around the carriage. His eyes rested on me with tolerant interest; I was painfully conspicuous. Then they slid to Miao, who let his head fall forward

on his chest as though he were drunk. I gathered that I was to do the talking.

"Where are you going to?" the colonel asked me suddenly. This is a common conversational gambit when travelling; it need not mean anything.

"Ho Ma."

"What is your business?" I knew this would be the next question.

"I am going to visit some friends, missionary friends." I did not know if there were missionaries at Ho Ma, but we could take a chance on that. It was the only good reason why any foreigner should be travelling at such a time. "Where are *you* going?" I returned the compliment.

He replied with a name that meant nothing to me. But he was obviously curious about Miao. "My friend is very tired," I said. "This train is not good for sleep." And I yawned cavernously.

The colonel took the hint. He stretched out again, and was soon snoring, with his head jolting rhythmically against the green suitcase. He kept his despatch-case under one shoulder.

The night seemed as though it would never pass. At larger stations, a guard would waken the colonel, who went out to talk to very deferential subordinates on the wind-swept platform. The halts grew longer and longer.

Then, before one was really aware of it, the dawn had broken. It made no impression on most of the passengers, who lay around in a stupor in the posture of fallen Titans. But at least it gave us something to look at besides the indecent slumbers of the Nanking colonel.

For this was magnificent country. All China is historic; but the Fen Valley, through which we were running, with its walled cities rising from the red earth, is one of the most ancient battle-grounds in known history. It was the scene of great and stirring events two thousand years before Socrates, and few of these have been forgotten. Here are buried some of the first kings of China, whose grave-mounds had crumbled before Beowulf became a legend for English minstrels. Every city along this valley has its story, familiar to any rickshaw-coolie today from the old Chinese dramas that revive, in a brief moment of pageant, the breath of ancient passions. No man knows the grave of Arthur; and where are the bones of Weyland the Smith? But China remembers the tombs of Yao and Shun and Yu, the first Three Rulers; and these Central and Northern provinces are still strewn with the monuments of forty centuries of change.

The continuity of Chinese history is a marvel; but only a static mind could see this vast Oriental civilisation as something static and unchanging. The Great Yu who "tamed the waters" in years before the Shang dynasty rose in Honan, who marked the course of the Yellow River so that people "could come down from the hills to which they had fled and again cultivate the rich soil of the plains," was an authentic "hero" of Chinese history: but he was also a portent of the historical process. Water-control, which was a necessary preliminary for the very existence of an agrarian society, became one of the chief specific features of the whole mode of production in China; and modern economists have given some meaning to the endless internal wars of kingdoms and dynasties

by the theory of "key economic areas" in Chinese history.¹ When the real character of Chinese economy is understood, the rise and fall of dynasties will become something more than a coloured scroll to catch the eye of connoisseurs. Only then can the developing pattern of Chinese society be clearly visualised, and the continuous process that runs through all these centuries of conflict and struggle.

Miao stood beside me at the window, telling me the names of some of the towns that we were passing. The morning sun slanted across the valley, towers and trees flushed golden through the mist. We drew in at a little station, where shouting peasants sold rice-gruel and dough cakes.

"Foreigners!" Miao said suddenly. Three obvious missionaries had entered the carriage—a grey-haired man and his wife, and a bright-faced youth in a blue scholar's gown. A Chinese pastor with them had the smug, comfortable look that seems to settle like a benediction on the features of all Chinese converts.

They sat together near the door: an alien element, walled off from the rest of the carriage by imperfect sympathies and conventional British reserve. The older couple were preoccupied with minor discomforts; they began to eat sandwiches in melancholy silence. The young man, after a curious glance in our direction, began talking to the Chinese pastor. "They are going to Ho Ma," whispered Miao, "to meet their friends."

This was a complication, in view of the presence of

¹ The pioneer in this field of modern economic studies is Dr. K. A. Wittfogel, whose monumental *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Chinas* is only the first volume of what may be a complete economic history of Chinese society.

the Nanking colonel, who was again showing a lively interest in our movements. Apparently Ho Ma was going to be very full of missionaries. I felt that I had better claim acquaintance.

The young missionary had only been in China a year and was still enthusiastic. We talked about the walled cities of Shansi and the life of the peasants in China's "Model Province," where opium is sold openly by magistrates as an opium "cure." Inevitably, conversation came around to Sian and the capture of Chiang Kai-shek.

This brought in the older couple, who till then had been sitting looking down their noses, waiting for an introduction. My appearance, I realised suddenly, was picturesque rather than reassuring.

"That dreadful creature Chang Hsueh-liang!" said the missionary's wife with explosive violence. "We pray every evening for the Generalissimo's safety."

The most ardent admirers of Chiang Kai-shek, in the years since his baptism, have been the Protestant missionaries in China. But I thought of the numbers of young Chinese lives that have met a violent end in Kuomintang prisons; of the stories of the Generalissimo opening his Bible at random to find a text that would favour the despatch of more aeroplanes to bomb Chinese villages, in the nine-year campaigns against the "Red bandits." It was an Old Testament kind of Christianity, I felt, that would give its blessing to such a modern Joshua.

I rejoined Miao, who was still looking conspiratorial in his corner. The Nanking colonel was very much on his mind. But suddenly that officer, who had been sleeping through most of the morning, snorted,

rose with alacrity, and departed with his bodyguard and baggage at an obscure little country town.

There seemed to be much more room in the narrow carriage. Outside the sun shone brilliantly, as we followed the river through high snow-covered hills. It was still shining when we reached Ho Ma some time after four o'clock.

The missionaries were greeted loudly by friends on the platform. Under cover of this exchange of compliments, we crossed the line with our baggage and came out by the walls of Ho Ma. We were speedily surrounded by an urgent crowd of rickshaw-coolies, donkeymen, and porters.

As we had begun to suspect from the look of the place, there was not a motor-car or bus to be had. The only "breath-cart" Ho Ma had ever heard of had belonged to the manager of the cotton factory beside the river; and he had taken it back to Shanghai two years before. The road was good, it seemed, in our direction; and the swiftest means of locomotion was by bicycle. But we had too much gear along with us, and Miao could not ride a bicycle. We had a choice of rickshaws, donkeys, or a Peking cart.

With a strong feeling of frustration, we plumped for rickshaws, which were probably as fast as anything else, and certainly more comfortable. I had once travelled for about ten minutes in a Peking cart, which is a covered, utterly springless affair, as unpleasant to travel in as any vehicle ever designed. I had vowed never to repeat the experience.

We bargained for rickshaws as far as Hsin Chang ("Chinchow" in local dialect), a *hsien* city on the other side of the Fen River, and as much as we could do that evening. Li chose four of the strongest-looking

pullers with great discrimination; we might have to keep them to take us on to the Yellow River. We piled the luggage into one rickshaw, and finally set out along the loess highway.

We were crossing a wide valley, bounded by flat cliffs. It was a pleasant countryside, golden-brown in the late winter sun. We passed neat little forts, the walls covered with anti-Communist slogans—these had been built after the incursion of the Red Army from Shensi in the spring of that year. It was already growing dark when we reached the Fen River; on the north bank, the walls of Hsin Chang climbed picturesquely up the loess cliffs.

The river was crossed by a bridge of boats, frozen into the ice. Near the bridge were the cheap inns where donkeymen and pedlars stayed. But this was a garrison town; and if we were to make a good impression, we must have the best quarters that Hsin Chang could offer. Before the sentry at the gate could challenge us, Miao was demanding a clean bed for the important foreign guest. My card was received with full ceremonial; a name card is an invaluable passport for the foreigner in China, especially if you have someone with you to describe in full your important connections. The officer of the guard himself escorted us to the best inn in the town.

We dined out—and extremely well—in a restaurant that was filled with soldiers and decorated with advertisements for Japanese aphrodisiacs. The inn, when we returned, was moderately clean and really cheerful, with a fire lighted in the brick k'ang, and an oil-lamp on the table. Li had spread out our bedding on the k'ang; my silk-lined sleeping-sack was a real luxury.

From the court outside came snatches of conversation, the grumbling of servants, and the echo of a drinking-bout across the way. It was all muted and rather pleasant, until a terrific quarrel broke out without any warning in the room next to ours. There were three voices, two men and a woman, in a dialect that was difficult to understand. But the woman seemed to be holding her own.

"They are quarrelling about who shall sleep with her," Miao announced. "But much too loud. I shall go and speak with them."

This was the first demonstration I had of my friend's power of oratory. He hitched up his braces, draped himself in his overcoat, and vanished into the court. I expected him to be knocked down, at the least, when I heard his quiet voice reading the trio a little lecture on good travelling manners. But he came back serenely a moment later, and deathly silence reigned. My respect for him was enormously increased.

We were roused early in the morning by the indefatigable Li. In default of any better conveyance, he had re-engaged the rickshaw-men of the day before. We made a hasty breakfast of biscuits and noodles, paid our bill, and departed.

However early you may rise in China, there is always someone up before you. Bullock-waggons were creaking along the narrow streets, and water-barrows groaning immelodiously, as we made our way towards the west gate. Where the waggons had passed, the roads were eighteen inches deep in mud. We came out under the walls on to a hard frozen highway beside the river.

It was so cold that we could not sit in the rickshaws, and got out to walk. Li, who had been very unhappy in the leather shoes (which he wore solely for reasons of "face"), had bought himself a pair of soft Chinese slippers, and strode along at a pace none of us could match. He was really enjoying himself. We were a curious party, but there are many curious people on the roads in China. And we could always pass for missionaries.

Soon the road curved upwards on to the rim of the plateau: beneath us the river wound white like a glacier. Ahead, across the broad mouth of the valley, was a shadowy line of hills. "That," Miao said with difficulty, "is Shensi." It looked a long way off, and our progress was pitifully slow.

We had lunch at a wayside inn, which should have been a caravanserai—it had all the conventional attributes, including the fleas. I had a constant fear of lice, to which Miao was supremely indifferent. This was surprising, since I had had typhus injections and he had not. Not long after this we passed the walls of another city—Hsi Shan. We were half-way to Yu Men K'ou, the crossing of the Yellow River. With the sun well up, it was easier going.

But we did not reach the river that night. Only a pale afterglow lingered above the Shensi hills as we drew near to Ho Ching, the last town of any size along our route. Night travel is not very popular in China; and this country, near the border of two provinces, had the usual reputation for bandits. We decided to leave the crossing for the next day.

We stopped at the first inn we found to drink tea; but the rooms were so filthy that my heart sank.

Here Miao excelled himself—he demanded the captain of the guard, and insisted on better accommodation. The captain, who was very young and embarrassed, admitted that there were no better inns in the town. He suggested we might call on the magistrate and stay at the yamen. But it was much too late for social calls. At last he had an inspiration, and led us down the street to the house of a friend of his—a cotton merchant, and one of the wealthiest men in the town.

Heavy doors opened in an unprepossessing shop-front, and we passed through into a court where piles of cotton glimmered whitely against the grey walls. The owner of the house was away; but we were received by his nephew, who did the honours with grave courtesy. We slept that night on a tiled k'ang, in a room with a carved ceiling and polished furniture. Even Miao, who knew China from all sides, was amazed at the luxury of our quarters. We were grateful for our welcome; but the contrast between the wealth of this household and the stark poverty of the villages through which we had passed was a revelation. There are few countries in the world where the "two nations" of rich and poor are so clearly distinguished as in China.

The next morning we saw the friendly captain and asked him about the river crossing at Yu Men K'ou. He assured us there would be no difficulty in crossing the river; it was frozen hard above the pass, so that we could walk across with ease. There should be no trouble with the authorities.

I had the feeling then that he was letting us down lightly, rather than spoil the impression of friendly welcome that had been established. But we were

eager to be off; we were only two hours away from the river. Tremendous protests from our host against our leaving any money for the servants led, of course, to our leaving much more than they deserved. We were feeling a little reckless, for across the river was Hanchang, where a car should be waiting for us. At last we were within striking distance of our goal.

. It was a clear sunny day; but as we drew nearer the river, a wind began to rise. There is always a wind at Yu Men K'ou, as we were to learn. Our rickshaw-pullers battled nobly against the gale, but finally we all got out and walked. The road had dwindled to a mere cattle-track.

Long before we came in sight of the great river, we felt it as a presence in the elements. The yellow dust blew hard and dry in our faces: it caked in the corners of our eyes and in our nostrils. A mile or so downstream from the pass that now showed clearly between the hills, an immense yellow cone of dust rose in the air. This was sand blown up from the river-bed by the wind, which hurtled between the hills as through a funnel.

We came down the last level of the plateau. Here on the plain, the ground was bare and stony, broken by scattered fields and hundreds of grave-tablets. Where no life would grow was, it seemed, a favourable resting-place for ancestors.

Away to the south, the Fen River skirted the loess cliffs on the other side of the valley, where it ran into the Huang Ho. To the north—very near and high—were the last of the Shansi hills, behind which lay the river-gorges. At the end of the range, opposite the gap in the hills on the western bank, lay Yu Men K'ou.



PEKING CARTS THE MOST UNCOMFORTABLE VEHICLES EVER DESIGNED



SAND, ICE, AND DUST THE YELLOW RIVER IN MIDWINTER

We rounded the flange of hills, suddenly sheltered from the great gusts of wind, and came into a narrow village street, ankle-deep in dust between dark little stone houses. In front towered the pass: involuntarily we quickened our pace. Following the street, we came out suddenly into the open, where the cobbled stones lost themselves in sand. At our feet—a dizzily swift current of brown water and hissing ice—ran the Yellow River.

“*Tao-la!*” shouted Miao, and the wind tore the words from his throat. “We have arrived!”

VI

A TEMPLE OF THE WATERS

It was a wildly romantic spot, like something in the Bavarian Alps, or along the upper Adige. Facing each other across the stream were two rocky escarpments, each crowned with a mass of temple buildings. And each was a fortress: looking up the cliff beside us, we saw the gleam of bayonets above the walls, and the grey caps of soldiers. We were on the border of a rebel province.

To cross the river by boat here was clearly impossible. The current ran out of the gorges like the sluice of a dam, carrying great slabs of ice from the edge of the floes (which were nearly a mile upstream from the pass). There was a sagging steel cable across the torrent, but that could not help us much. All the boats of the village were anchored down for the winter, and ranged along the bank, half-buried in sand.

Li emerged from a wretched little wine-shop where he had been making inquiries. The only crossing was over the ice, upstream, where the river was frozen hard between the hills. And the one way to reach the crossing—unless we turned back and scaled the range—was by a path that led through the temple-fortress on the cliff.

“Looks as though we’ll have to try it.” Miao nodded agreement; together we climbed the steps, cut from the solid rock, to the temple entrance.

It was a magnificent building, a monument to "Great Yu," who tamed the waters and fixed the course of the Yellow River. Buried in a vault beneath the main altar were supposed to be the instruments with which he planned this gigantic task, the celebrated "Labours of Yu," which "opened up the nine provinces, cleared the nine roads, embanked the nine marshes, levelled the nine mountains." If others after him had followed Yu's plan, and continually dredged a channel for the silt-laden waters (instead of trying to build ever higher and higher banks to contain them), the Yellow River might never have become China's Sorrow.

Now, as we stood before the entrance to Yu's temple, we noticed a small open gateway on the river-side. It led to a cliff-path and was guarded by a single soldier. He gazed at us curiously, but did not seem hostile.

"What do you think?" I asked Miao. "For five dollars he might let us through." My friend considered.

"Too risky," he announced finally. "You are a foreigner, and there is a civil war. I think we must get an official pass."

Our scruples were to cost us three days in Yu Men K'ou.

We found a young lieutenant in charge of the garrison, and approached him with great formality. His manners were impeccable; but he informed us with regret that he had strict orders to let no one cross the river. All who arrived from the Shensi side were immediately arrested, he said; and showed us a group of unfortunates, with their hands bound be-

hind them, guarded by soldiers in an inner court. When we pleaded the urgency of our case, and our own importance, he shrugged his shoulders with exquisite politeness and invited us to lunch.

He was so nice that for a second time we hesitated to offer money; and the game was lost. Instead, we asked that he should telephone to the officer of the garrison at Ho Ching (our friend of the night before), who was his superior. This was done, but with the unsatisfactory result that we were told we must approach the magistrate in Ho Ching to get his permission.

Even Miao began to wilt at this, but he gallantly put through the call. The magistrate, of course, was out at a feast. When we finally reached him some hours later, he apologised profusely and said he must wire to Taiyuan for instructions. It might take a day or so for an answer; in the meantime, if we were uncomfortable at Yu Men K'ou, which was a wretched, wind-blown spot, he would be delighted if Mr. Po and his secretary would be his guests at his humble yamen in Ho Ching.

"That's done it!" I groaned, when Miao told me the result of his negotiations. "Once the thing is sent back officially, we can't bribe anybody, unless we bribe Yen Hsi-shan. What do you think—is it too dangerous for you to stay here?"

"Safer than Ho Ching," he replied. "I think we stay here, and try to find another way." With a wealth of compliment, he refused the magistrate's generous invitation. Foreigners were very obstinate people; and this one was reluctant to turn back, even for twenty *li*. He would be glad if the magistrate would send a very *urgent* telegram.

We spent the rest of that day exploring the temple and making friends with the soldiers. The favourite of the garrison, we soon discovered, was a small boy called Hsiao Hu ("Little Tiger"), whose father was a detective-captain, and the senior ranking officer at Yu Men K'ou. We decided to cultivate Little Tiger and family. This was playing with fire, as we realised; but it seemed to be our best chance.

Captain Wang, the detective, was a large jovial man, as detectives frequently are, both in fact and fiction. His job was to watch the opium-smuggling across the Yellow River, and to look for Communists. The first part of the job was probably more profitable to him than the second; anyhow, he seemed quite reconciled to a life in the wilderness (unlike the lieutenant, who was a more sensitive soul, and grumbled a lot about the dearth of entertainment). Captain Wang was clearly our man.

And Little Tiger was the way to his heart. We praised the child's round limbs, his strength and intelligence, his striking resemblance to his father. I taught him to say "Hullo" and "Good-bye," which I hoped would be a vocabulary adequate to our stay in Yu Men K'ou. Before long, we had an invitation to live with Captain Wang (who had one wing of the temple to himself) as long as we were likely to remain. One thing we were determined upon—we were not going back on our tracks.

The next day was colder and windier than before. Down in the village we had a secret conference with Li, discussing our chances of climbing the hills ourselves, and finding a place where we might make the crossing. But the only way to the frozen river, be-

sides the temple-path that was now closely guarded, was a matter of several miles, part of which would be really strenuous climbing. Again we cursed our baggage.

About midday, returning to the temple, we discovered the gate to the river-path open. They were changing guard. By this time we were getting desperate: I suggested a frontal attack. Miao agreed, and we quietly collected our baggage and set out as nonchalantly as we could through the gate.

We had got about fifty yards down the path when a shout from a sentry above us called out the guard. With an air of supreme indifference we continued on our way. There was a chorus of protest; we soon found ourselves surrounded by an excited group of soldiers who tried to push us back with rifles. "It's now or never," I whispered to Miao. He nodded. With fixed, foolish smiles we continued to advance.

Our friend the lieutenant came speeding down the path behind us. To all his protestations we returned a single answer. This was a mad foreigner who intended to cross the river, even if he had to swim it: they would stop him at their peril. Foreigners had strange impulses, and many inconvenient privileges. And this was a very important foreigner.

It was a fantastic scene—this gesticulating group on a narrow rocky path above the great river, which swept in a wide curve below us, the dark water flecked with white. It was the coldest colloquy I ever took part in: I think most of us waved our arms around more to keep warm than to give point to our remarks. I was hopelessly beyond my rights, of course, but the young officer did not know that. All he knew was that, if we got away, he would be held responsible.

The soldiers tried to seize our baggage: I snatched mine back again, but Miao could not be quite so high-handed. He was being forcibly held by both arms; they had even begun to drag him back. "You go on," he called to me. But I could not leave him like this. The lieutenant was in tears—partly from emotion, no doubt, partly from the icy wind. Something had to be done.

We delivered an ultimatum. If we returned now the officer must guarantee that we would be allowed to cross by noon on the next day. It was pure blackmail, but we wanted something tangible for our efforts. Reluctantly he agreed to this; and, to everyone's satisfaction, we abandoned that windy scene of debate for the shelter of the temple.

Had we really gained anything? An hour later, I noticed, the river-gate was barred and padlocked, with heavy beams of wood propped against it. The soldiers, Li informed us darkly, had been given orders to shoot—foreigner or no foreigner—if we made another attempt. We were virtually prisoners in the house of the fat detective.

And the lieutenant had vanished.

It was Christmas Eve. For days we had had no news of Sian. And here we were marooned in a temple (however famous) whose roof-trees groaned incessantly under the raging wind, whose rocky base was washed by the implacable torrent that cut us off from our goal. Direct action had failed; there was nothing left but a return to diplomacy. Miao spent most of that afternoon on the telephone. I retired to bed—the only place that was tolerably warm—and endeavoured to console myself with Shakespeare's

sonnets, which was the only book I had brought along. The situation called for drama: I felt like Yseult in her rock-bound castle. But against the rising undertones of wind and wave, I found echoes enough for our uncertainty.

Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck;
And yet methinks I have astronomy,
But not to tell of good or evil luck,
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality;
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,
Pointing to each his thunder, rain and wind,
Or say with princes if it shall go well,
By oft predict that I in heaven find. . . .

If nothing else came of our enforced confinement, I vowed, I would at least work out a new theory of Shakespeare's sonnets. It was a fitting occupation for a monastery.

But unsuspected allies rallied to our cause. The detective-captain began to show sympathy; not for nothing had I taken Little Tiger's picture and allowed him to play disastrously with my typewriter. He talked to his friends in Ho Ching, and announced that two of them would come that evening to call on us—the magistrate's secretary and the garrison officer (who was certainly responsible, we pointed out, since he had allowed us to come on to the river without warning us of the new regulations).

About five o'clock the secretary arrived, blue with cold, on a bicycle. The captain rode over a little later. Detective Wang invited us all to a feast. Here the lieutenant appeared, full of apologies for his "rudeness" that morning. All differences were dissolved in a haze of rice-wine and tobacco-smoke.

The detective was a notable drinker, and he was

our host. There seemed to be possibilities in this situation. I had a brief conversation with Miao (fortunately English was a private language in that company). "This is your chance to get somewhere," I suggested. "If you can keep a clear head, I'll look after the drinking side of it." He nodded unsmiling agreement.

We turned to business.

It was a homeric feast. *Pai ka'rh*, or "white and dry," is one of the strongest of Chinese liquors. It is not unlike schnapps or vodka; some varieties, according to unverified sources, are flavoured with pigeon droppings. It is drunk by the cupful, hot; and the effects are terrific.

The Chinese are very modest about their drinking. They have a number of games, with penalties; always it is the loser who has to drink, rather on the principle of an English "sconce." The cups are small, but the penalties may be frequent. In the most popular of these games, which is a show of fingers by two persons, both players try to guess the combined numbers of fingers shown. The shouts grow louder and louder as the guessing moves to a triumphant conclusion. But the winner, if he is anything of a man, will always drink in sympathy with his "victim." So both morality and dry throats are satisfied.

I was a fool at the finger-game, but that was all to the good. When drinking began in earnest, the company automatically sorted itself out. The detective was a scratch man—he named his capacity at three *chin*, which put him in the three-bottle class. The lieutenant was a good second (*Yu Men K'ou*, which had so few diversions, was a good training-ground for topers); the captain from *Ho Ching* ran him close.

The magistrate's secretary, a bookish kind of man, was a poor drinker, but the little he had made him very sentimental. Miao pleaded a weak stomach, so he remained the only sober member of the party.

I remember that Christmas Eve through a glass darkly. The broad luminous face of our host as he filled up my cup; the frowning concentration of the lieutenant, trying desperately to outplay his superior officer; the woebegone look on the face of the secretary (who was really the key man) as he lay back on the k'ang and gazed mournfully at the ceiling, wondering why he had come there. At intervals Miao would detach one of the company from the table and engage him in whispered conversation at the far end of the room. Out of the corner of an eye that had long lost its keenness, I could still catch his persuasive gestures. No canvasser could have wished for more malleable material. Our host was insatiable; he continued to call for more wine, until even the servants began to look alarmed.

The party broke up before midnight, when I had already had more than enough. A couple of orderlies escorted our gallant commanders back to bed. The lieutenant knocked off his cap in a farewell salute; Miao still had the secretary fast by one of the buttons of his jacket, and was making what looked like hypnotic passes at him. Detective-captain Wang, moving on his feet as stealthily as a bear, was finishing a story I would have given a lot to have understood.

When at last they were gone, Miao came up to me gleefully. "We leave tomorrow morning. It is all arranged."

"Fine," I said with difficulty. "Wake me up with

cold water." If indeed we should get away, I felt we might fairly claim that we had drunk our way across the Yellow River.

The next morning—I realised with a shock that it was Christmas Day—we lost no time in pressing our advantage. With fingers numbed with cold and a head still reeling from our party of the night before, I typed an impressive letter to Marshal Yen Hsi-shan, Supreme Governor of the Province of Shansi, in which I explained that we went across the river at our own risk, and against the advice of his officials, who had done their best to dissuade us. No blame was to attach to them because of our obstinacy. I gave one copy of this letter to the detective at Yu Men K'ou, and sent another on to the magistrate in Ho Ching. Miao drafted similar statements in Chinese, which we signed with great ceremony. In return, Wang gave us a special pass for the crossing, with a request that those on the other side should give us every assistance. We did not quite know what to do in return for his hospitality; finally Miao bought a pair of dark-rimmed glasses for the handsome sum of ten dollars (about ten times what they were worth). He said he wanted them to keep out the dust; actually they were a useful disguise, in territory where he might be recognised.

We bade a solemn farewell to the Temple of Yu, whose coloured tiles shone brilliantly in the pale sunlight, the few stalwart trees already groaning in the rising wind. After this curious interlude within temple walls, we still hardly believed that we were continuing on our way. Miao was inclined to put down our successful departure to his own skilful

diplomacy; I was quite sure we had to thank Little Tiger and the *pai ka'rh*. As we learnt shortly, there had been an economic factor more potent than any of these.

Hsiao Hu said "Good-bye" for the last time to us (though I am sure he has not ceased saying it to many others on less appropriate occasions). His round little face was ecstatic over the pile of coppers we had collected for him. Our hosts—the detective and the lieutenant—accompanied us amicably down the cliff-path that had been the scene of the altercation of the day before. They had given us bearers for our luggage, and a soldier to guide us across the ice. We parted at the foot of the cliff with expressions of friendliness that were perhaps not altogether insincere.

Here the path began to climb along steps cut out of the rock. Around the corner of the bluff the wind hit us like something solid. Clinging to the face of the cliff, we worked our way downwards to the edge of the ice-floe. Our guide pointed out the way on to the ice, which on this lee side was inches deep in dust and powdered snow. Having once set us in the right direction, he beat a hasty retreat.

It was not a very comfortable crossing. The flat surface of the ice, where the wind had blown it smooth, was polished like glass. Across this we slithered gingerly: my boots, which were nailed for walking, were not very well suited to this kind of surface. I steadied myself long enough to take a couple of photographs; the wind almost blew the camera from my hands. I remembered a five minutes' halt at Krasnoyarsk, crossing Siberia, with the thermo-



HSI MEN K'OU, SISTER FORTRESS OF YU MEN K'OU
Notice the lumps of ice floating downstream. In the background are the loess cliffs of the Shensi shore



OUR HOSTS AT YU MEN K'OU
The Lieutenant, the detective, and most important
"Little Tiger"

meter at sixty below—the wind then had cut like this, but one could always dive back again into a well-heated compartment.

Once we had reached mid-river, we were above water where the current ran most strongly, against the curve of the further bank. Here the ice was broken into huge slabs, piled around like the ruins of masonry. At the edge of some of these slabs there were ominous cracks. And only a few hundred yards downstream was the edge of the floe, from which large sections would disappear with a grinding roar every minute, to emerge a moment later surprisingly far down the brown current. I was unpleasantly conscious of the volume of water that must be passing beneath our feet; and of the speed with which it ran between these hills.

Li was now leading the way, and we followed him in a straggling file, bent against the wind which blew dust and dry snow into our faces. But on the other side we missed the path and came up against rocky cliffs. We had cut direct across the river, instead of slanting upstream. And none of us was especially anxious to retrace his steps.

We could see where the path ran, high up along the side of the hills. There was nothing for it but a climb.

Li was the hero of that episode. Somehow he managed to find a way up the cliff and to get our larger baggage passed up. Miao, who was not an athlete, proved to be as clever as a cat on the rocks. When we finally reached the path and looked down on the rather terrifying gulf beneath us, we felt that celebrations were in order. At last we were in Shensi.

We were all drenched in sweat, despite the bitter wind. Li sat on the bedding-roll and mopped his long

face with a red handkerchief. Then he came out with a surprising piece of information.

"They let you go," he said cheerfully, "because they lose too much money."

"How?" I asked. Our board and keep, which I thought he must mean, could not have amounted to so very much.

"Before you come, many people cross this river. They give to the soldier on guard four dollars. But when you telephone to the magistrate, they have to close the gate, not let anybody through. Over a hundred people were turned back each of those three days."

I looked at Miao. More than a thousand dollars! No wonder they had let us go. Economic pressure, it seemed, had succeeded where all my "face" and Miao's diplomacy had failed. We had certainly missed our cue at the start.

From this time we paid a perhaps exaggerated deference to Li's opinions.

With a feeling of real exhilaration we strode along the mountain path, following the cliffs downstream until we came to Hsi Men K'ou, the temple directly opposite our late prison. As we looked down on the tiled roofs, we heard the sound of an engine, and an aeroplane flew low across the hills behind us, heading towards Taiyuan. We could see the silver Kuomintang sun on its wings. Probably it came from Sian.

At the temple we produced Captain Wang's pass, and demanded mules or donkeys. The people were very astonished to see us—Li told us later that they agreed we must have come from the aeroplane, since

no one had come across the river for so long. But they gave us a guide to the nearest village where we could hire donkeys.

We waved a last farewell to the guards at Yu Men K'ou—there was a diminutive figure on the highest battlement that I was sure was Little Tiger. For some miles we trudged along the sandy bank of the river. Below the pass it broadened out to a width of at least half a mile: here, in the shelter of the loess cliffs, it was almost warm. Except for a few narrow channels, the river was completely frozen over with light ice.

At a mean little village on the river-bank we secured four donkeys to take us to Hanchang, a *hsien* city about twenty miles to the south. It was here that Miao hoped to make the connection with his friends. We were determined to complete the journey in one stage.

All our gear had been loaded on the donkeys, and I was having a private debate as to whether I dared add another twelve stone to the substantial load my beast already carried, when there was a wail of despair from Li. I had never seen him show strong emotion before; but it appeared that he had lost eight dollars climbing the hillside above the river, and was determined to go back to retrieve it. We persuaded him that it was more urgent to press on to Hanchang, but he was inconsolable. All that day and at intervals during the rest of our journey, he illustrated by a lively pantomime the way in which the money had slipped out of his inner pocket as he raised one knee to climb. This personal tragedy shook him more than any hazardous adventure. It was probably the first money he had ever lost in his life.

That was the most strenuous Christmas Day I ever spent; even an English Christmas, with mixed hockey in the afternoon and indoor games at night, could not compete with it. It should have been easy going, as we were on the plain again. But the loess levels changed continually, so that there were innumerable climbs and descents along cuttings in the yellow soil. The dust rose around us in clouds, till we were all as yellow as our donkeys. I walked most of the way, as I had an unconquerable objection to riding an animal a third of my own size. This curious habit gave endless amusement to the donkeymen.

But it was beautiful country in that soft sunlight, with pagodas and temple-roofs breaking the brown line of the fields. Most of the way we followed the river: we had a certain affection for it, in its more placid plainland moods. The whole landscape was very Italian, as many parts of North China are. And the colouring of the bare hills was exquisite.

Coming into one little village, we heard the sound of bugles and met a company of soldiers marching out. They were on their way to Hsi Men K'ou, so it looked as though our crossing had been very timely. They were Feng Ching-tsai's men, Miao said; but we did not dare stop to question them. We would find out what was happening at Hanchang.

That night there was a full moon, which saved us. It was nearly nine o'clock before we came over the brow of a hill and looked down upon the sleeping city. As we came near the shadows of the gate, we were challenged sharply. It was an hour when no good men are abroad. And we were almost too weary to answer.

We found an inn, no better and no worse than

most; and had a Christmas dinner of mien and wheat-cakes, squatting on a brick k'ang. That Christmas Day was to be historic in China, though we had no inkling of it then. "To-morrow we will find out about the car," said Miao contentedly. Sleep engulfed us like a wave. In a half-dream, I could still hear the sound of the Yellow River.

The next morning we went early to call on the magistrate. He was an uncertain quantity, for we had had no news of Feng Ching-tsai, and did not know if this country was friendly to Sian or Nanking. The yamen was a symphony in Kuomintang blue, and I had never seen so many New Life signs before. "I don't like the feel of this place," I whispered, as we waited for the great man to appear. But Miao was more optimistic.

The *hsien chang* came in at last. He was a smooth official type, but modern and business-like. The interview opened very formally; Miao was obliged to surrender the last visiting-card he had, with the name of Chou inscribed on it. The magistrate asked a great many questions about both of us. Why were we so anxious to get to Sian?

I explained that I was a journalist, and added that I had important business with Chang Hsueh-liang and the Generalissimo.

"Then why go to Sian?" asked the magistrate suavely. His eyes rested on me, and again on Miao. "You will not find either of them there."

We were frankly nonplussed; and I did not like his manner. "Why?" I blurted out at last.

"You did not know? But of course, we only heard this news by radio last night, from Nanking. Yester-

day Chang Hsueh-liang and General Chiang Kai-shek flew together from Sian to Loyang. Today the Generalissimo will return to the capital."

He watched the effect of the news on us. Miao turned a little pale; I did not believe it. It was impossible that Chiang could have been released, and so soon.

"But we still want to go to Sian," I insisted. "Is there a motor-car or truck in Hanchang?"

The magistrate was all apologies. No motor-car had been in Hanchang for weeks. He was very positive on this point. And still his eyes dwelt curiously on Miao, who blinked nervously behind his dark glasses.

We left the yamen with unseemly haste. "Can this news be true?" I asked my friend. "It was broadcast from Nanking. And Marshal Chang always said that if the Generalissimo were released, he would go back with him." He sighed deeply. "But we must leave Hanchang—at once. I do not like that magistrate."

I was inclined to agree with him.

VII

THE WALLS OF SIAN

WE returned to the inn very downcast. This was the worst setback yet: it almost seemed that our journey had been in vain.

What had happened in Sian over that eventful Christmas? If Chiang Kai-shek had really been released, it looked as though the bottom had dropped out of any movement in the North-west. Chiang in captivity had been their strongest political argument; to give up this advantage they must have been very sure of themselves indeed, or utterly desperate. Miao was completely at a loss.

And our own position was far from comfortable. We were more than a hundred miles from Sian, well inside Feng Ching-tsai's territory. The ambiguous attitude of that enterprising war-lord could not long remain in doubt; if this news was true, he would certainly throw in his lot definitively with Nanking. We were in hostile country, and the danger of my friend being recognised was greater than ever.

We had expected a car to meet us—but there was no car in Hanchang, if we were to trust the magistrate. Miao decided to risk a telegram to friends in Sian, asking for a car to be sent to Hoyang, the next town to the south. In the meantime, we must push on as quickly as we could. Hanchang—which had seemed

a haven of refuge an hour ago—was beginning to feel rather unhealthy.

Once more we had to fall back on rickshaws. We scoured the town and managed to find three, which agreed to take us to Hoyang. But as we left the courtyard of the inn, one man tipped his rickshaw over backwards, almost stunning the unfortunate Li. It appeared that he was a tyro, impressed into service without previous experience. Li swore he would never risk his neck with such an amateur (you can take quite a dangerous fall from a rickshaw), so we left him to find a donkey, and continued on our way. It was three hundred *li* to Sian, and we could average about five miles an hour.

We crossed an old stone bridge and began to climb into loess hills. High on the slope we passed a magnificent temple dedicated to Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the "Father of Chinese History." This was fascinating country if we only had time to explore it. From the top of the plateau, where we waited for our rickshaws with the luggage, we could see the Yellow River white against far hills. The brown fields had a hint of green, where early grass or the first crops were coming through. There had been a fresh fall of snow on the uplands, and the air was crisp and clear.

The rickshaw-men came sweating up the slope, their bronzed faces shining. They had harnessed their rickshaws to Li's donkey, which in addition carried Li and the bedding roll. The donkey, patient beast, seemed used to worse things than that. And then we heard the engine.

"Aeroplane," said Li, scanning the heavens. "Not a bit of it!" I shouted. "It's a car coming up the hill."

We were just at the crest, where it must come slowly. This was a moment of real excitement—the thought of those three hundred *li* to Sian had become almost an obsession with us. Would the car be friendly? Would it stop?

A moment later we saw the front of a military truck coming fast up the hill in low gear. Behind the cab were blue-grey uniforms and the muzzles of rifles. At the least it was well guarded. I threw an agonised query to Miao, who was watching the truck intently. Whatever the risk, we had to take it.

From the middle of the road we hailed the driver. At first it seemed that the truck would not stop, and we had to leap aside. Then there was a jarring of brakes and a sudden shout of recognition from inside the cab. A young man in uniform who had been sitting beside the driver jumped out and shook Miao's hand warmly. At last our luck had turned. We had found our friends.

The young officer was a special messenger from Yang Hu-cheng, the Shensi war-lord who had joined forces with Chang Hsueh-liang in the Sian mutiny, to Feng Ching-tsai, the unfaithful disciple whose attitude had been giving us so much anxiety. He was on an eleventh-hour mission to try to bring the waverer back into the fold. So far, it seemed, he had not been very successful.

Feng had refused to see him, wanting to know why a friendly messenger came in a military truck with an armed escort. This was a fair indication of how the wind lay; the messenger, who had also been instructed to look out for our arrival, had come north to Hanchang the day before. That night the magistrate in Hanchang (whom we had seen only a few hours

ago) had tried to arrest the whole party. The special messenger, who was a very determined young man, had relied on his rifles, and got clear away.

"What about the release of Chiang Kai-shek?" Miao asked the burning question.

"We left Sian two days ago. But I'm afraid it's true."

Our instinct in leaving Hanchang so speedily had not been wrong. Now the truck was making for Hoyang, where there was a "neutral" magistrate. These mixed allegiances were very bewildering; apparently Feng Ching-tsai had not yet definitely broken with Yang Hu-cheng, though he had had a million dollars and promotion to a first-rank command already from Nanking. Like nine Chinese warlords out of ten, he would take all he could get from both sides. But Yang's hold on him—the hold of a former bandit-chieftain over his subordinate—was very strong.

This explanation, which sounds so complicated, took barely a minute on that hillside. Li had already paid off our rickshaws, and thrown our baggage into the truck. We climbed over the side, and a moment later were speeding southward.

Whatever the confusions of the State, it was an enormous relief to have made this contact and to have some more reasonable means of conveyance. The last hundred and fifty *li* had taken us five days to cover; now we swept over the loess highlands at forty miles an hour. A new and subtle power seemed to communicate itself from the six cylinders of the sturdy American truck. The guards—solidly built Shensi men from Yang Hu-cheng's 17th Route Army—kept their rifles loaded and handy. We felt that we could fight our way, if need be, to Sian.

It was growing dark when we reached Hoyang and drove at high speed into the courtyard of the yamen. The magistrate was unwell (probably a diplomatic illness), but his officials made us very welcome. We were excellently entertained.

But in the middle of the night, as Miao and I shared a wooden k'ang, Li slipped into the room with an alarming story. The truck had been seized, he said; and the whole party would be arrested at daybreak. Li was pretty level-headed as a rule, but now he showed obvious signs of distress. It might be mere servants' gossip; on the other hand, it might not.

There was not very much we could do about it. But we went back to bed with our boots on.

The first grey light was showing through the paper windows when a soldier came into our room with a message for Miao. Still half asleep, I heard the low tones of urgency. Miao laid a hand gently on my shoulder.

"We must leave at once. Feng Ching-tsai is at Ta Li. We go now to see him there."

This was not very reassuring, I told myself as I gulped a bowl of steaming rice-gruel and struggled into another sweater. It sounded suspiciously like the spider and the fly.

It was bitterly cold as we drove through the morning mist between the snowdrifts. The road swung dizzily around the brink of deep ravines in the loess, and dropped or climbed from one level to another with disconcerting abruptness. Our driver, I decided, was either a genius or a maniac, or both. Most Chinese drive well—they are superb airmen, with a

touch of recklessness conspicuously lacking in the Japanese. But they rely implicitly on the machine. I wondered what would happen if the brakes failed. They did not fail.

We shared cigarettes with the soldiers in the truck. Two of these were non-commissioned officers—one a veteran who had been with Feng Yu-hsiang, that enigmatic figure of Chinese politics who (whatever else he may have been, and he has been most things in his time) was certainly a born leader of men, and trained his troops with an efficiency only equalled in the Chinese Red Armies. This sergeant had a brown face wrinkled like a walnut, and a straggling beard and moustache of which he was inordinately proud. On each ear he wore a little fur-lined cap, shaped like a heart and embroidered with peasant designs. The corporal was a typical Shensi youth, with a full-moon face and a high colour, who stood at the side of the truck and shouted fiercely at bullock-drivers or stray beggars as we hurtled past. We left a wide trail of dust and startled live-stock in our wake.

Before noon we reached Feng Ching-tsai's capital. It was a compact little city with impressive walls, and very heavily guarded. Above the battlement were the grey hoods of soldiers and the black muzzles of machine-guns. We followed a sunken road some distance from the walls, and stopped a few hundred yards outside the West Gate. Feng was taking no chances by letting the truck inside the wall.

The special messenger disappeared inside the gate, in the centre of an armed guard of Feng's men. Chinese war-lords have very suspicious natures. Our troops remained to guard the truck. Miao and I had taken cover in a little peanut and candy shop, where

we drank coarse tea and ate wheat-cakes hungrily; and kept out of the way.

Two hours passed like this. The soldiers had settled down to some gambling game with perfect equanimity. Miao and I walked restlessly up and down, and indulged in gloomy speculations.

"What do you think has happened?" I asked at last. He shrugged, and fluttered his hands in an expressive gesture. "Either he has seen Feng, who has entertained him at a dinner—that might last as long as this—or else he has been detained." I was inclined to think the latter.

Ta Li was at least the fringe of civilisation, and battered motor-trucks and lorries lurched along the paved street outside the gate. One of these was a mail-van with two postmen, in the green uniform that is familiar all over China, sitting on top of the canvas bags. To my surprise, Miao suddenly hailed one of these men by name. He had an amazing range of friends: I sometimes felt that he knew everybody in the North-west.

"We might go in the mail-van," he suggested. It could be arranged.

I looked doubtfully at the derelict truck, reflecting on the miracle by which country mails were ever delivered in Shensi. But just then there was a gruff shout from the sergeant: "*Lai-la!*" They were coming.

Our special messenger emerged from the gate, politely escorted by half a company of Feng Chingsai's troops. He parted from them apparently on excellent terms; but Chinese etiquette can be very deceptive. We scrambled back into our truck without more ado.

"Bad man, Feng," said our envoy briefly as he joined us at the truck. "But I have a pass to Weinan, so we can go the direct way." This was something; without it, we should have had to go a longer way round to Sian, avoiding all Feng's territory. The driver was discovered with difficulty; he had been drinking wine in an inn. But he revved up the engine furiously, and departed with obvious relief from Ta Li at hurricane speed. Later we were to discover how lucky we had been in getting through. Another day might have been too late.

All afternoon we sped through the Shensi fields, stopping only to fill up the petrol tank from tins of spirit we carried with us. This urgency suited our mood; only in the rebel capital could we get an adequate idea of what was really happening. And we hoped to make Sian before nightfall.

It was a poverty-stricken countryside. The fields were bare, and the broken earth was hard with frost. Only graves seemed plentiful—often these were elaborate structures of brick and tile, more substantial than the homes of the living. We would approach the imposing walls of a village, only to find on passing through it that half the houses were in ruin, and perhaps only a quarter of them inhabited. The peasants by the roadside gazed without emotion at the military truck. For everywhere were soldiers, armed. There was war in the air, and the fear of war hung over these barren fields.

At every town we were challenged; but our corporal waved his pass and shouted, and we usually swept through without a halt. The snow grew deeper; we crossed one river precariously in a barge that fought its way against the drifting ice. It was growing

dusk when we reached the banks of the Wei Ho, which comes from the west out of Shensi to meet the Yellow River at Tungkwan.

We ran down to the water's edge past great bomb-craters in the road. The ferry had been attacked from the air the week before. Here we met other trucks filled with soldiers who were going north—I could not think why, unless it was to fight with Feng Chings-tsai. We crossed in a flat-bottomed punt, and all helped to push the truck up the greasy banks. Now we were into the war zone, for Weinan was heavily garrisoned by Tungpei troops, and was the front of civil war.

In the curving main street every doorway was filled with grey-blue uniforms. The North-eastern troops had caps of grey fur, which gave them a barbaric look; but they were tall and well-built. Many of the Manchurian troops originally were immigrants from Shantung, which is a province noted for fine physique. It has produced some of the best soldiers of China. Miao was as thrilled as a child to be back among his own people again.

We were running now alongside the Lunhai railway, with only another eighty *li* to Sian. To the south was a line of terraced hills; in front of us stretched the broad Wei valley. This was fertile land, very peaceful in the winter evening. But how long would there be peace in this valley that had once been a battleground of empires?

There were troops along the hills; and on the highway we passed lines of cavalry, the men walking the horses. These were the long-haired Mongolian ponies, lineal descendants of the horses that carried the armies of Chinghiz Khan. They are hardy little

animals, with great endurance and an astonishing turn of speed. I thought how much better suited they were for winter campaigning than the foreign-bred chargers the Japanese used to exercise on the glacis in Peking.

"You know this country?" I asked my friend. He smiled. "Very well. I escaped from here, when I left Sian before the 'Double Twelfth.' Soon we will come to Lintung, and the hot springs where Chiang Kai-shek was staying before he was captured." At the mention of this, he sighed heavily. For him the movement had been lost with the release of the Generalissimo.

The sun was a great orange disc slipping down behind distant mountains, when we saw the rounded walls of a little town at the foot of a bold range of hills. It was Lintung. Opposite the town, on the first slope of the Lishan range, was a cluster of temple-roofs amid bare, crow-nested trees. This was Huachingkung, the famous pleasure-resort where the great beauty of China, Yang Kuei Fei, dallied with her paramour while the T'ang dynasty crumbled. Appropriately enough it had been the scene, not two weeks before, of the capture of a modern dictator.

Twelve miles to Sian; and the engine which had served us so nobly was showing signs of strain. It was dark now, and the headlights cut out a swath of light along the dim highway. Over on the railway embankment we could see the motionless silhouette of deserted trucks. In front, the river glimmered wanly.

"Pa Ch'iao—the most famous bridge in China," Miao said, as we laboured across its uneven marble



OUTSIDE THE WEST GATE OF FENG CHING-TSAI'S CAPITAL
On the right is the peanut shop where we lay low while the special messenger entered Ta Li itself



PA CH'IAO—THE MOST FAMOUS BRIDGE IN CHINA

slabs between low balustrades. A scholar, he knew every name in history or literature that filled this river-valley with echoes from the past. Three thousand years ago, Ch'ang An (the modern Sian) was the capital of the first of China's great dynasties. Two hundred and fifty years before Jesus, the great peasant revolution of Ch'in had swept this valley, and all the countryside through which we had passed. It was a fitting background for stirring events.

We were all tense and expectant; some quality in the night was strange and disturbing. We passed the walls of a village—not a light was to be seen. Then, as we climbed a steep slope between banks of loess, a sharp challenge rang out; hooded figures with threatening rifles barred the way. A light was flashed on the truck; someone gave the password. We moved slowly on. The engine was firing on three or four cylinders only.

Suddenly Miao caught my arm. "You see the lights? Behind them are the walls of Sian."

A factory was working a night-shift, with all its windows ablaze. And beyond, darker than the shadows, a heavy mass cut the faint stars. As we watched, a searchlight swept the battlements, picking out the great buttresses, and the white, canvas-shrouded shapes of guns that pointed skywards. Sian was a city under arms.

We passed the outer gate, halted a minute by the guardhouse to present our full credentials. With a jarring of bolts and the clang of heavy steel, one door in the main gateway swung open. Slowly, its engine labouring badly, the truck moved under the walls. It was nearly eight o'clock on Sunday, December 27th. Our journey to Sian had taken us eleven days.

"We go first to the house of a rich friend of mine," Miao had said. "Then you will find a room at the Sian Guest-house—where Chiang Kai-shek's staff used to live. It is very modern—you can take a hot bath."

I was not surprised that he should have rich friends; though I was hardly prepared for the splendid room in which we found ourselves ten minutes later. Servants brought hot water and scented tea. Two charming small children, with shouts of "Uncle," burst in from a back room with obvious delight. This was a new side to my friend that I had not seen before. He was naturally affectionate, and would make friends (I guessed) even among those who most distrusted his ideas.

I watched him now, in the familiar dark suit that our strenuous travels had effectively ruined, playing with the children. He seemed to belong so naturally to this atmosphere of warmth and comfort, the fine scrolls and paintings on the walls, all the easy security of wealth. But these things that he so obviously enjoyed meant nothing to him (I knew) beyond the moment. He had risked them before, and was to forfeit them entirely, for the sake of something that he could not perhaps have put into words—least of all into the single word "China." He was a revolutionary, perhaps, by temperament; but of the meaning of that word as Lenin understood it, or the leaders of China's Red Army in their ten years' struggle, he had only a vague romantic notion.

I had asked him once, "Why are you doing all this? Why do you work in this movement?" He had given his nervous, charming smile, and begun to sing "*. . . My home is beyond the Sungari.*" I knew

what that home had been—a small village farmhouse; I knew that his uncle and two brothers had died fighting with the Manchurian Volunteers. Perhaps this was the answer; this, and the fanatical light that came sometimes into his wide, rather dreamy brown eyes. Friends called him “Miao Feng-tze,” or “Miao the Madman.” But it was an infectious kind of madness, among all the young Chinese; and not least, among the exiles from Tungpei.

He had left the room to telephone to Headquarters. Returning, “My friends will come soon,” he said. “And then you will see”—there was a touch of flamboyance about him sometimes—“the three men who made the Sian coup.”

I did not believe everything Miao said; but, as I found out later, this was hardly an exaggeration.

We were sipping our excellent tea and enjoying the warmth of the stove, when there was a quick step outside the door and a young soldier came into the room. He was short, and very powerfully built; in a fur-lined greatcoat, he looked almost as broad as he was long. Taking off his cap, he showed a youthful, closely-cropped head. His age was twenty-five, but he had the shy yet eager manner of a schoolboy.

Miao hailed him with delight; and the newcomer shook hands quietly, but with evident satisfaction. “This,” Miao said, introducing him with pride, “is Colonel Sun Ming-chiu—the man who captured Chiang Kai-shek.” I felt I was expected to murmur congratulations.

Not long afterwards a second man arrived. He was taller, older, dressed in the dark uniform of an official. He wore rimless glasses, behind which keen

eyes narrowed into slits. With all his air of a typical Chinese bureaucrat, there was a restless energy about the face. His manner on introduction was composed and formal; he spoke excellent English. "Mr. Ying Teh-tien," said Miao. "Secretary to Marshal Chang Hsueh-liang."

I had felt at once an unusual camaraderie between the three. Miao hastened to explain the relationship. "I have the ideas," he said modestly. "Ying has the brain—he works out the plans. And Sun"—the young colonel looked embarrassed—"is the man of action. Here you have the Three Musketeers of Sian!"

We talked far into that night; for many things remained a mystery to me, and even to Miao. At last I could get a story of the whole Sian affair that might make sense. On the question of Chiang's release, it was not easy at this time to get positive information—it had obviously shaken Sun and Ying rather badly. But on that first night in the rebel city I saw the whole sequence of events unroll like a film. In high relief were the two central characters of the Generalissimo and the Young Marshal; but it was not as a drama of personal ambitions that this narrative held the attention. One felt the mass indignation of armies; the clash, not of individuals, but of high policy; the stirrings of a great national movement that might sweep China. More clearly than at any other time, I realised how much might hang upon the issue of the Sian revolt. And I saw how mistaken we had been, to suppose that with the release of Chiang Kai-shek all was over. This movement had to go on.

Here is the story of Sian, as I learnt it from those who helped to make the revolt.

VIII

BANDIT-SUPPRESSOR OF THE NORTH-WEST

WHEN Chang Hsueh-liang brought the Tungpei army to Sian in October 1935, a new chapter opened in the history of China's North-west. At the time, this transfer of North-eastern troops—the most bitterly anti-Japanesc force in the country—did not seem especially significant. But what had terrified local officials, and alarmed Nanking, and caused something of a sensation in Japanese staff-headquarters in North China, was the appearance over the western borders of Shensi of the scarlet banners, the black hammer and sickle, of the advancing vanguard of the main Chinese Red Army under Mao Tse-tung. It was to meet this challenge that Chang Hsueh-liang was sent north.

In 1933 the Young Marshal had gone abroad very much under a cloud, after the *débâcle* of Jehol had lost China an area twice the size of Austria and planted the Rising Sun on the ramparts of the Great Wall. It has already been suggested that the young commander, so often held directly responsible in these events (as in the case of Manchuria eighteen months before), was perhaps more a tool of unscrupulous policies than a coward. But his personal humiliation was real enough; and after Jehol, as we have seen, Chang resolved once for all to free himself

from the fatally inhibiting drug-habit that had been his worst enemy in times of crisis. This was the first step towards an interesting political development, which in the space of three years was to traverse the whole distance between the two most clearly polarised creeds of our time—Fascism and Communism.

Chang Hsueh-liang left Shanghai in a party which included his wife and three children, and a close friend of those days, Count Ciano, formerly Italian Consul-General in Shanghai, and now better known as the Foreign Minister of Italy, son-in-law to Il Duce and his possible successor. They went direct to Italy, where Chang spent several months. He met Mussolini, whom he admired; and motored along new highways that impressed him with the concrete triumphs of the Corporate State. In Germany he met Hitler and General Goering, who made a less favourable impression. He visited France, and had a chance encounter with Litvinoff. Chang at this time, having become something of an amateur of political systems, was very anxious to visit the Soviet Union. But this appears to have been discouraged. One version of the Litvinoff incident is that he was refused permission to travel wherever he wished in Soviet Russia, and would go on no other terms. Another, and more likely story, is that the Soviet authorities were afraid of possible repercussions in Far Eastern relations, if they invited the late ruler of Manchuria within their borders. Whatever the reason, the Young Marshal did not go to Russia; and reports that he visited Moscow secretly are quite baseless.

The last months of the tour were spent in England, the country which—after Italy—seems to have held out most attractions to this modern Citizen of the

World. Chang took a house at Brighton, where the children were sent to school; and later came up to London, where he stayed at the Dorchester, and met a curious selection of people, among whom were Lord Hailsham, Lady Astor, and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald. On all his travels the Young Marshal seems to have been once again the playboy, recapturing his lost youth. But he picked up a number of impressions that only later years were to sort out. Pictures of him taken after his return to China show a hearty young man in tweeds (Chang's favourite sport was golf), looking at least ten years younger than the thin figure with drooping moustaches that had belonged to the Manchurian days.

Did Chang return from Europe a Fascist? The question is interesting, in view of some of the things that were said of him after the Sian coup and the obvious trend towards dictatorship in China at the time of his return. Unquestionably, at this time he had a firm belief in the Fuehrer-Prinzip: for him, the one leader of China (and he has never really wavered in this) was Chiang Kai-shek. But the question was rather, what sort of leader Chiang Kai-shek might make himself. One of the Young Marshal's first statements on his return to China was that "the only way of national salvation is to support the Leader." This was early in 1934, just after the democratic Fukien rebellion, when the Leader had been busily engaged in directing the bombing—from planes which had never been used against Japan—of the remnant of the "heroic 19th Route Army," which had fought so gallantly, and indiscreetly, at Chapei two years before. Shortly after his return, the admirer of Mussolini was given the official position of Commander of

Bandit Suppression in the three central provinces of Honan, Hupeh, and Anhwei.

The title is eloquent. The "bandits," of course, were the Chinese Red Armies and Red partisans—Communist-bandit has always hitherto been the accepted term for any member of the Communist Party or of the armed forces of the Chinese Soviets. At this time, in 1933–34, the Soviet area in China had been consolidated in southern Kiangsi and Fukien, with its capital at Juichin. But there were bands of Communists operating in half a dozen other provinces, and it is estimated that upwards of sixty million people lived under the Chinese Soviets. "Bandit-suppression" was regarded by Nanking as the major problem of Government policy, and Chang Hsueh-liang's new post was an important one. He took up his quarters at Wuhan in April 1934, and made a good start by lecturing all his officials on their duty of supporting Chiang Kai-shek and the Nanking Government. But before long, he found himself asking a great many questions.

1934 was the year of the great drive against the Communists—the so-called Fifth Campaign that called into action the most formidable land and air force that the Nanking Government has yet mustered. Chiang Kai-shek had determined to liquidate the whole Communist movement in that year, beginning with the Red stronghold in Kiangsi. Tungpei troops took part in these campaigns, but their heart was not in it. They were homeless men themselves, trying to dispossess their fellow-countrymen, and they did not relish the task any more than their easy-going commander. The seeds of discontent had been sown far back, when they had been withdrawn from

Manchuria without even putting up a fight. There was only one kind of fighting that interested them, and that was the fight back to their homeland.

The story of the Fifth Anti-Red Campaign is familiar enough in China, though it is perhaps not so well known abroad. Long and costly campaigns had been waged against the Reds before, with striking unsuccess. The country favoured their kind of fighting, they could move three times as fast as any attacking force, and the people were with them in all the districts fought over. Nanking's plan now was to isolate the main Soviet area, enforce a complete blockade, and change the personnel of the attacking forces as often as possible (for Nanking troops who had been in contact with the Reds for any length of time had a fatal habit of going over to join them). And the effort was made on such a scale that it proved irresistible.

Chiang Kai-shek established his headquarters at Nanchang, capital of Kiangsi, which had been the scene six years earlier of the sensational rising led by Chu Teh, from which the Chinese Red Army had its beginnings. For his Fifth Campaign the Generalissimo mobilised nearly a million troops, at least half of whom were directly engaged in the course of it. All the military resources of the Nanking Government, which had so sadly failed the country during the Jehol invasion the year before, were now thrown into this anti-Red drive. German staff-experts drew up the plans; heavy artillery, tanks, aerial bombing, and gas were used in the grand offensive, and an "iron ring" was thrown around the Soviet district, slowly narrowing, as new roads and forts were built, around the

Red capital. The cost of the campaign was immense; the loss of life, especially among peasants and non-combatants, was appalling. And the Reds, who had withstood so many expeditions in the past, were unable to hold their ground.

But if the object of the Fifth Campaign had been the destruction of the Chinese Red Army, it cannot be said to have succeeded. The Reds were dislodged from the area they had held and defended for more than five years, but their armies were not broken. They escaped from the "iron ring" into Hunan by a manœuvre which won the admiration of military experts of all countries, and set out on the famous "Long March" that has now passed into history. Some day the full story of this march will be told: it is a story that will be difficult to parallel. From the borders of Fukien to the far North-west, this army of less than 100,000 troops marched in all more than 7000 English miles, traversing the provinces of Hunan, Kwangtung, Kwangsi, Kweichow, Yunnan, Szechuan, Sikang, Chinghai, and Kansu. They fought their way without a break or a real halt through territory where there were always hostile troops to oppose them, and they kept their leadership and discipline intact (though half their numbers were lost) until, in the autumn of 1935, the vanguard reached north Shensi, where they united with the 26th and 27th Red Armies, which had occupied this area since 1933.

What is important to notice here is the political strategy of the march to the North-west. Early in 1932 the Chinese Soviet Government in Kiangsi had officially declared war on Japan. This gesture, which

might have seemed meaningless in the remote mountains of the South, acquired a new significance once the great trek began. The withdrawal from Kiangsi, from areas that had been organised over some years into working rural Soviets, was unquestionably a retreat, and a retreat that might easily have proved disastrous. By brilliant field tactics, the retreat became the most convincing object-lesson yet given of the military superiority of the Reds' leadership and fighting power. But more than this, by the announced new policy of the Chinese Communists, the movement northwards became a resolute advance towards the "anti-Japanese front." On August 1st, 1935, the Communist Party issued a manifesto proposing the organisation of an Anti-Japanese Alliance Army and a National Defence Government. What might have been a disorganised rout was transformed into a march of victory.

The strategic importance of the North-west for Japanese policy is abundantly clear. Since the conquest of Manchuria and Jehol, the direction of military penetration has been insistently towards Inner Mongolia, with the obvious intention of driving a wedge between North China and any possible connection with Soviet Russia through Sinkiang or Outer Mongolia. Control of the North-west would safeguard Japan's hold on North China and secure her lines of communication in the event of war with the Soviet Union. All this is evident from a glance at the map; the invasion of Suiyuan in 1936 by so-called "Mongolian Irregulars" (the cause of Mongol independence being supported by forced levies from the Chinese peasants living in "Manchukuo") was only another manifestation of the same general strategy.

One of the more pleasing features of Japanese policy, for the historian, is its consistency. And the "Continental Policy" of the Japanese militarists, while changing governments at home may affect its tempo, remains unchanged in its essential demand that the next step after the occupation of Manchuria should be the effective occupation of Mongolia. An extremely interesting document that has been widely circulated in China since the summer of 1936, and is generally known as the "Matsumura Report," discusses all these questions in some detail. As with the famous Tanaka Memorial, the authenticity of this Report cannot be proved; but it is so close an approximation to the facts of Japanese policy that it is almost certainly based on genuine sources. The Report recommends the continuance of the "Manchuria-Mongolia" policy by indirect means, such as the utilisation of "independence" movements among the Mongols, and the encouragement of power politics among Chinese war-lords. A noteworthy feature of the report is the attention paid to the Chinese Red Armies in north Shensi, which are dignified with the style of the "chief enemy of the Empire." While every effort was made by the official Chinese Press to minimise the importance of the new Communist base in Shensi and Kansu and Ninghsia, the Japanese were not deceived. Suppression of the Communists became a fundamental condition for the continuance of "friendly relations" between the governments of China and Japan.

All the possibilities of this situation were foreseen by the Red Armies when they made north Shensi their goal. Over the rivers of Szechuan and across the mountain passes of Sikang they fought their way

northwards, to the region of loess highlands that was the first home of the race of Han, and the cradle of Chinese civilisation. They were confident that if once they could come within striking distance of the Japanese, they might rally the whole country behind them in a united war of national resistance. And not only Japan saw the danger, but also those elements in the Nanking Government that had so successfully avoided a war with Japan in the past. Every effort, short of military co-operation with Japan, must be used to prevent the Reds from coming into contact with Japanese or Japanese-paid troops in Inner Mongolia. The Red Star in the North-west was a dangerous portent.

1935, the year of the Long March, was a critical year for Chang Hsueh-liang. In his comfortable quarters in Wuhan, far enough inland, it might seem, from the rising tide of Japanese aggression, he still felt with the whole nation each successive shock of Japanese penetration. The secret Ho-Umetsu agreement in June was a special affront: Chang had very good information about this, and later published the full terms of this infamous protocol in the Sian newspapers. Doubts as to the wisdom of the policy he was officially entrusted with began to assail him. At this time he stated at Hankow: "Our people have persuaded me to accept a policy of 'Non-resistance'; but now I hope my leader will change my duty, from this task of bandit-suppression to active resistance to Japanese imperialism. I am convinced that any sacrifice we may make in these bandit-suppression campaigns is not so worthy as sacrifice against Japan." Soon after this came the crisis in Chahar, when Sung

Cheh-yuan resigned in the face of Japanese pressure. Chang was again very indignant, and said in a public speech: "After September 18th (the Mukden incident) we made the mistake of believing that our appeals to the League of Nations and our invocation of other peace agreements would save us. When we retreated then, we hoped for outside help. Now all this dream has vanished. It is clear that we must help ourselves; we must make life from death. The Government should now mobilise the whole forces of the country to resist Japan."

These statements are of interest in showing that, even before he went to Sian, Chang Hsueh-liang was becoming strongly critical of the policy of the Central Government, though he remained personally loyal to Chiang Kai-shek. But in October the order came for him to take his army up into the North-west to meet the newly arrived Communist forces. At this time he seems to have been persuaded from Nanking that "bandit suppression" was indeed the first stage of resistance to Japan.

On his arrival in Sian, Chang was especially anxious to "get results" in his anti-Communist campaigns, as the Kuomintang Session was meeting shortly, and he had already been accused of negligence of his duties. He gave orders for an immediate attack. But he received a very severe shock when, in two successive engagements, his troops were badly defeated. Two of his best divisions, the 101st and 109th, went over to the Reds; in both cases, the Divisional Commanders had been killed in the fighting.

This was the last serious campaign that Chang led against the Red Armies. At the end of 1935, he was

convinced that the Reds could not be destroyed by open attack; and he reported as much to Nanking. The Tungpei armies remained in occupation in the North-west, but offensive operations against the Reds dwindled month by month. Something like a truce had already been formed between the common soldiers of the Tungpei army and the Reds; before long, this was to be unofficially implemented from the Bandit Suppression Headquarters. The most successful slogan the Communists could use was the simple phrase, "Chinese don't fight against Chinese!" It had an irresistible effect on the North-eastern army, who came to realise that the Reds were as anti-Japanese as themselves, and asked nothing more than an opportunity (which they were supposed to prevent) of advancing against Japan in the North.

Several things were becoming clear to the Young Marshal. In the first place, he began to suspect that part of the motive of Chiang Kai-shek in sending the Tungpei army to fight in the North-west was to achieve its final disintegration. The original body of over 150,000 Manchurian troops was already divided; its artillery had been separated; part of the army still remained in south Hopei under Wan Fu-lin. After the serious fighting in the last months of 1935, Chang had received no reinforcements: his troops were not regularly paid, and they had none of the equipment which had been so lavishly procured for the Fifth Campaign in the South from the fifty-million-dollar American "Wheat and Cotton Loan." If Chang did not realise at once, his men and the younger officers were quick to point out to him, that Nanking was using once more a tactic that had been used very successfully in the past—namely, of splitting up and even

destroying the troops of a potential rival, which could not be easily assimilated into the trusted armies of the Central Government.

But more and more, Chang was coming to grips with the whole "problem" of Communism in China. He studied the past history of the Chinese Communists and the Red Army: he heard from his own men, who had been captured by the Reds, and released by them, something of the real condition of things inside the Soviet region. In June, he met and talked with one of the chief political leaders of the Red Army—Chou En-lai, a picturesque figure who emerges later in the Sian drama, as perhaps the controlling influence in reaching a settlement. Most of all, perhaps, Chang was convinced by a young regimental commander, Kao Fu-yuan, who had been captured early in the year, stayed several months in the Soviet area, and returned to report enthusiastically on the training and organisation of the Reds, and their new policy of a People's Front of National Resistance against Japan. (This Kao was later one of the first victims of the Nanking occupation of Sian, after the collapse of the revolt.) Chang reached the conclusion that the chief force driving young Chinese—students, intellectuals, and soldiers—into the ranks of the Communists, was dissatisfaction with the policy of Nanking *vis-à-vis* Japan.

The Communists, for their part, were lying rather low, since the new United Front policy had been announced. Early in 1936 a Red Army force of some 30,000 rifles invaded western Shansi, and almost reached Taiyuanfu. But this was more a reconnoitring expedition than anything else: it was also an armed demonstration of the new policy of the Reds.

The old anti-Kuomintang slogans were abandoned in favour of slogans of national defence: as early as 1935, Communist manifestoes had concentrated entirely on questions of national resistance. The Red Armies withdrew from Shansi, taking a substantial haul of captured munitions with them; there had been very little confiscation of property on this campaign. On August 1st, 1936, the United Front policy was more fully developed in a statement by Mao Tsetung, Chairman of the Chinese Soviets. By this time a good working understanding had been reached between the Tungpei army and the Reds; and Chan Hsueh-liang had become an enthusiastic advocate of the policy the latter suggested. The two cardinal points in this, we may note, are entirely consistent with the policy Chang held when he first succeeded his father in Manchuria—to stop all civil war and unite the country in active resistance to Japanese aggression.

From the merely passive rôle he had played in the months after his first defeats at the hands of the Reds, Chang Hsueh-liang now began to take an active part in organising the work of "National Salvation" along the lines of a united front of all parties. Sian became a centre for anti-Japanese propaganda, which was strictly suppressed by the Nanking Government in all other parts of China. The Tungpei army was already fanatically anti-Japanese, and Chang established a special Officers' Military Training Camp at Wang Ch'u, not far from Sian, where courses were given in politics as well as strategy; and a very radical group of younger Tungpei officers and officials came to dominate all the lower ranks of the army. A little

later, part of the Tungpei University, which had been transferred from Mukden to Peking, was removed to Sian, and became a centre for patriotic propaganda. Some two hundred students from Peking were also invited to Sian by the Young Marshal, and formed a Special Regiment and Political Training School under the command of Sun Ming-chiu. By the autumn of 1936 an influential base of anti-Japanese sentiment and organisation had been built up in the North-western capital.

All this did not escape the vigilant eye of the Generalissimo, who began to feel that Sian needed watching. The chief Kuomintang representative in Sian was Shao Li-tzu, Civil Governor of Shensi. Shao was a capable official, and could certainly be relied on; but he had no military power, and only a small number of Special Police and "Gendarmerie"—a polite name for the secret organisation better known as the "Blue Shirts," which took its orders directly from Chiang Kai-shek, and had been active all over China in terrorist suppression of any left-wing organisation. On the other hand, General Yang Hu-cheng, the "Pacification Commissioner" of the province, had 40,000 local troops and was a redoubtable fighter. With dismay Governor Shao saw Yang Hu-cheng and Chang Hsueh-liang drawing closer together; and Chang's army had already called a truce with the Reds. Alarmed messages sped along the wires from the Shensi capital to Nanking.

This was the situation late in October, when Chiang Kai-shek himself flew to Sian to investigate matters. Once more the Young Marshal placed before his chief the arguments that he had repeated so often before. His troops would not fight the Reds; they

were clamouring for the order to move against Japan, especially since the invasion of Suiyuan by Mongol "irregulars" had given Nanking the opportunity to develop a defensive action into an advance into Chahar. Why not come to terms with the Reds, Chang argued, since they were genuinely patriotic Chinese, and turn all guns against the national aggressor? Even at this stage, Chiang Kai-shek seems to have badly misjudged the situation. In several speeches to army commanders, and to the Military School at Wang Ch'u, he insisted that all this talk about fighting Japan was madness: the enemy close at hand, the enemy the Tungpei army must fight, was the Communist.

While the rest of China indulged in a patriotic glow about the "defence of Suiyuan" and the "stiffening of policy" towards Japan which they discerned in the shadow-play of Nanking diplomacy, Chiang pushed ahead quietly with preparations for the new anti-Red drive in the North-west. The Tungpei army was clearly unreliable material, so he began to isolate it, moving in Central Government troops which he felt he could trust. One of Chiang's best commanders, General Hu Chung-nan of the First Army, was ordered to begin the offensive that the Tungpei men had so long delayed. Early in November, Hu Chung-nan began to advance slowly into Kansu.

But even these troops were not very happy about their duty in killing Communists at this time of national crisis. They had been brought north, believing that they were being sent as reinforcements to Suiyuan. When it became clear that they were moving west and not north, they had to be promised double pay before they would go on. General Hu

advanced warily for about eighty *li* into Soviet territory, but did not see a single Red soldier. Then he forgot his caution, and fell into the same trap as many a commander who had fought the Reds before him. Advancing into a narrow valley without any water, two brigades of his crack 1st Division were cut off and surrounded on November 18th. Three days later, the Reds again attacked; and General Hu beat an ignominious retreat. The new campaign had made an inauspicious beginning.

Chang Hsueh-liang was able to point his moral about the difficulty of defeating the Reds on their own ground in an open campaign. On November 27th he renewed his appeals to the Generalissimo: the crisis in Suiyuan was at its height, and he could no longer control his army, he said, unless he mobilised at least a part of it to the anti-Japanese front. Chiang invited the importunate Bandit-Suppressor to Loyang, but returned evasive answers to all his questions. Troops could not be sent through Shansi, he said, because Yen Hsi-shan would object; planes could not be sent to Suiyuan, because the air was too cold. The air was colder in Kansu, as the Young Marshal remarked; and this had not interfered with the bombing of the Communists there. But the Communists, Chiang argued again, were the chief enemy of the nation (an opinion with which the Japanese thoroughly concurred); nothing must prevent the extermination of the Red bandits. The only thing that seems to have been settled at Loyang was that the Generalissimo promised to come to Sian again shortly to interview the Tungpei and Hsipei commanders.

Chang Hsueh-liang returned to a city where

feeling was running high. At a time when reinforcements in Suiyuan were urgently needed, when the whole country fully believed that they were being sent, the most anti-Japanese army in China was being ordered to go ahead with preparations for another campaign against its fellow-countrymen. Officers of the North-western forces had voted unanimously in favour of joining the anti-Japanese campaign. The situation was growing tense.

Into this atmosphere of suspense and scarcely concealed insubordination, Chiang Kai-shek and his staff arrived from Loyang on the morning of December 4th.

IX

MIDWINTER MUTINY

SIAN welcomed the Generalissimo in the approved New Life manner. The streets were swept, and all the rickshaw-men were given new blue-and-white jackets, with a name and a number. Across the North Gate by the railway station, in immense characters, ran the legend: "SUPPORT CHIANG KAI-SHEK, THE REVOLUTIONARY LEADER!" Ironically enough, this inscription remained through the two months that followed, and was furbished up again to welcome the Nanking troops when they finally reoccupied the "rebel" city.

The road to Lintung, where Chiang was to stay, was smoothed for his car by the labour of hundreds of coolies. Inside the old courtyards of Huaching-kung, two days of feverish activity had freshened the woodwork with a new coat of paint, and wired the buildings for electric light and telephone. Easy chairs were fetched from the city, and a more luxurious suite than Yang Kuei Fei had ever known was prepared in her pavilion for the Generalissimo.

Chiang had brought with him his personal body-guard of forty-five picked men. In addition to these, another fifty troops, carefully chosen from a Loyang regiment, took up their quarters at Huachingshih. Guests who had been staying in the hostel, peasant families who lived in the outbuildings, were bundled

out at an hour's notice. With a few of his closest associates—Chen Ta-chen, his chief aide, Chiang Hsiao-hsien, his nephew, and some others—Chiang Kai-shek moved into the temple-hotel.

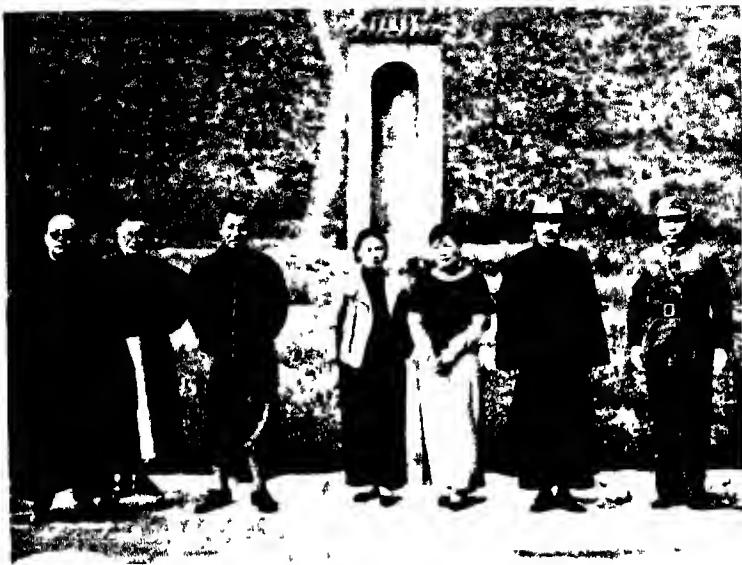
The rest of his staff, which included some of his best generals and most trusted advisers, put up at the Sian Guest-house, the only modern hotel in the city. Here there were also staying at this time General Ma Chan-shan, the famous cavalry leader from Manchuria, who had once tricked the Japanese into giving him a portfolio in the Government of Manchukuo, and departed with two million dollars to carry on with the Volunteers; and General Yu Hsueh-chung, a North-eastern commander whose frankness had won him the attentions of the Japanese in Tientsin, and who had been transferred by Chiang Kai-shek's order (after the conclusion of the Ho-Umetsu Agreement) to Kansu.

In the days of conference that followed, the issues became perfectly clear-cut. Chiang had only one present purpose: to go ahead with the new campaign against the Communists. Marshal Chang and his associates, including Yang Hu-cheng, the Shensi general, and Yu Hsueh-chung in Kansu, wanted to stop fighting the Communists, and move against Japan. It was the old debate that had been going on between the Generalissimo and the Young Marshal for more than a year. Chiang Kai-shek maintained that "unification of the country" must precede any kind of action against Japan; and more than anything else, unification of the country meant to him forcible suppression of the Red Armies. Chang Hsueh-liang urged that the Red Armies were now prepared to co-

operate with the Nanking Government against Japan; that the "bandits" could never be "suppressed" in a single campaign, and that it was better to come to terms with them and form a united front of national resistance.

This was a clear issue of policy; and in any democratic country it would have been debated in public, thrashed out in the Press until it was agonisingly familiar. China is not a democracy; the period of benevolent "tutelage" under the Kuomintang bureaucracy has never yet relaxed sufficiently to allow any frank and open discussion of national problems. One side of this debate—the official one—had been heard so often that many people believed it out of sheer inertia. The Communists were an inhuman breed of monsters who lived by murder and pillage. They were the inveterate enemies of a united China, who must be destroyed root and branch before an active foreign policy could ever be followed. In arguing that there were other ways of achieving unity than by costly and infinitely protracted civil wars, Chang Hsueh-liang was stating at least a reasonable case. But it was a case that could never be stated openly in Nanking.

And at this time, as has already been indicated, many people honestly believed that the Central Government was preparing active resistance, and even counter-attack, in Suiyuan. Chang Hsueh-liang and his friends knew better. They had seen the three divisions of Central troops in Suiyuan concentrated along the south-eastern borders of that province, as far away from the front as they could get, but in an excellent position to move against the Reds. They had seen the immense supplies of food and ammunition and motor-spirit that had accumulated in the North-



PRINCIPALS IN THE SIAN DRAMA

T. V. Soong Chang Hsueh-liang Chiang Kai-shek
Shao Li-tzu Madame Chiang Yang Hu-cheng



THE MEN BEHIND THE REVOILT

These fur-capped Tungpei soldiers were the mainstay of the anti-Japanese policy

west, along the Lunghai railway west of Sian. They knew that not a single Nanking plane had been sent to Suiyuan, though every day Japanese planes were used to bomb Chinese troops and Chinese villages. And now, with the arrival of the Generalissimo, they saw eighty of Nanking's latest bombers—the "birthday planes" raised by patriotic subscription for the defence of the country—land at the Sian airport in readiness to start operations against the Chinese Communists.

There was no room left for doubt. Chiang Kai-shek had not come to Sian to discuss their demands; he had come to supervise in person the beginning of the anti-Red campaign.

To anyone familiar with the mood of the Tungpei troops, the announcement of such a policy at this time must have seemed dangerous. There can be no question but that Chiang miscalculated badly: he seriously underestimated the resistance to the new campaign among his own armies in the North-west. He knew, of course, that there was some opposition, but imagined that he could override this. So he carefully avoided meeting the Tungpei commanders in a body, but talked to them separately, trying to win them over to his point of view. These are some of the replies he received: "My mother, General Chiang, was killed by the Japanese; my two brothers and my sisters perished in Manchuria. . . ." "My father's body, torn by Japanese bayonets, remains unburied outside my native village." "We must obey your orders, Generalissimo; and we have done so until today. But we will not fight our own people any longer. We must fight back to our native land, which

calls us and needs us." To every commander, Chiang made the same reply: China was not strong enough to fight Japan, their first duty was to destroy the Reds. The interviews were not a success.

All the elements of crisis were there in the Shensi capital. And once more—as so often in China in these last years—the precipitating factor was a student demonstration. Wednesday, December 9th, was the anniversary of the Student Movement in Peking the year before, that had been so effective a protest against Japan's carefully laid "Autonomy Movement" for the five northern provinces. On this day, in Sian, thousands of students from the Tungpei university and the various middle-schools of the city paraded through the streets from early morning, demanding reinforcements for Suiyuan. They could not see Marshal Chang, so they went to the Headquarters of the Provincial Government, where Shao Li-tzu assured them of the patriotic sentiments of the Kuomintang, and told them not to disobey their school regulations. They visited the Pacification Commissioner, General Yang Hu-cheng, again without result. Baulked in Sian, they determined to march out to Lintung to see the Generalissimo in person.

The local authorities became alarmed, and tried to dissuade them from this. Outside one school the police, acting on orders from their Commissioner, Ma Chih-ch'iao (who, in turn, had his instructions from the Civil Governor, Shao), fired on the procession, and seriously wounded two middle-school pupils. Highly incensed, some four thousand students forced their way through the East Gate and set out to demand a reckoning at Lintung. This began to look

serious, for whenever student demonstrations are fired upon in China there is likely to be trouble. Chang Hsueh-liang, when he was told of the shooting, immediately followed up the procession in a car, and overtook it at Pa Ch'iao,^t the famous bridge across the Wei River where emperors of the old Ch'ang An used to farewell their viceroys. Here he addressed an excited crowd of students, and asked them to return to the city. Within a week (he promised) he would give them a satisfactory answer to their demands.

Feeling ran high, especially among the younger Tungpei officers. On the next day—Thursday—there was a joint conference of the military commanders of the North-west and Chiang Kai-shek's staff. The war with the Communists must go on, the Nanking men insisted. If Marshal Chang and his army refused to co-operate, they would be transferred to the South; the "Bandit-Suppressor" who had been so friendly with the bandits had already been officially replaced in that office by General Chiang Ting-wen, one of the Generalissimo's most trusted supporters. On December 12th, it was announced, the new order for the resumption of the Anti-Red Campaign would be published in Sian. A deadlock had been reached.

This was the eve of mutiny, as even Chiang Kai-shek seems at last to have realised. On the Friday he ordered a special train to be prepared for his departure the next day, when the new military orders would come into force. But he never caught the train.

Late on that Friday night, an emergency meeting was called by Chang Hsueh-liang and Yang Hu-cheng; this meeting included a number of senior com-

manders, and the young "radical" group of officers and officials. There were thirteen members present at this midnight conclave, that took the decision to forestall the new campaign by the arrest of Chiang Kai-shek and all his staff.

The Young Marshal gave strict orders that Chiang was to be captured alive: this delicate task was entrusted to the young captain of his bodyguard, Sun Ming-chiu. Sun had command of the Tungpei Special Service Regiment, which included a number of the Peking students who had recently gone to Sian. A similar regiment of Yang Hu-cheng's was detailed to surround the Sian Guest-house and other important centres in the city. The whole coup was planned in a couple of hours, with an efficiency that suggests considerable forethought—in point of fact, the young officer group had been living for a moment like this. Zero hour was set for 6 A.M. on the following morning.

Before dawn on that morning of Saturday, December 12th, many people in Sian were awakened by the sound of a gong furiously beaten, followed by the sound of firing from various parts of the city. The Guest-house, which stood back in its own grounds and could be easily isolated, had been surrounded in the small hours. At six o'clock Yang Hu-cheng's troops—who have the local reputation, like their leader, of being little more than bandits—broke in to arrest the Generalissimo's staff. Foreigners staying in the hotel were alarmed by the shooting down of doors and the sudden incursion of wild-looking soldiery; there were shots on the landing, and the stairs ran with blood. All rooms were forced open, and there seems to have been a certain amount of

looting; Yang's troops got out of hand pretty easily. But the surprise was complete—there was no organised resistance, and the whole staff was captured with only minor casualties. Tales are told of the postures in which some of Chiang's leading generals were discovered, which do more credit to their discretion than to their valour. Fortunately, in China these things are by common consent forgotten as soon as may be.

At the same time, important points in the city—Kuomintang headquarters, railway and telegraph stations, "Special Action Centres" (the "cells" of the secret Blue Shirt organisation, complete with documents and wireless sets), were invested and occupied. The Bureau of Public Safety, which is the grandiloquent Chinese name for a police station, was surrounded; the Governor, Shao Li-tzu, was seized, after his wife—a former Communist—had been wounded in the hand, trying to effect his escape. At the aerodrome, the whole fleet of Nanking bombers was captured: the Shensi troops, who had been ordered to disable the planes, knew no better way of doing this than to thrust their bayonets through the petrol-tanks, until one of the Nanking pilots suggested that a better way might be to remove the sparking-plugs. The only resistance offered was by some of the Generalissimo's Special Police, and this did not last for long. Within two hours Sian was very effectively in the hands of the mutineers.

But the most vital concern of all was the capture of the Generalissimo. What had been happening in the meantime at Lintung?

From the night meeting of the thirteen conspirators, the young captain of Chang Hsueh-liang's body-guard went straight to Pa Ch'iao, the bridge across

the Wei River where the Young Marshal had talked to an angry crowd of students three days before. Here two hundred of his men, from the Special Service Regiment of the Tungpei army, awaited him. Briefly they were told of the plan to surround Chiang Kai-shek's headquarters—a treasonable action which they seem to have accepted with unseemly enthusiasm. Quietly they were loaded into motor-trucks and set out towards Lintung.

Tungpei troops were already at the top of the mountain behind Huachingkung when the first truck drove recklessly up the short willow-drive to the temple. Three sentries were on guard at the gate; they challenged the truck, and fired, but were quickly silenced. The Tungpei men gained the first courtyard; most of Chiang's bodyguard had been asleep, and were in no position to offer resistance to a sudden attack. Taken at a disadvantage, they made on the whole a very half-hearted attempt at defence.

Very soon after the attack on the main gate, Sun and his men reached the inner courtyard where the Generalissimo's quarters were. They broke through the glass doors, to find a scene of confusion and disorder. The first room was empty; in the second, where Chiang had been sleeping, they found bed-clothes in disarray; shoes, uniform, a cap—but no Generalissimo. Chiang Kai-shek had escaped.

There was only one other gate through the temple walls; this was at the back, and led out to the bare slope of the Lishan hills. Through this back gate Chiang must have hurried immediately after the first alarm. The Northern troops scattered up the mountain in pursuit.

Below in the courtyards and around the lotus-

pools a running fight was still in progress. One of the first Nanking officers captured had been Chiang Kai-shek's nephew, the notorious Blue Shirt leader Chiang Hsiao-hsien. When the Tungpei men learnt who he was, they stood him up and shot him dead on the spot. There were nearly a hundred picked Government troops inside the temple walls; but they were demoralised, without a leader, and unable to retreat. They had half a dozen machine guns, which they attempted to bring into action: had these been handled resolutely, the attacking force might have been held off for hours. But there was no real determination to resist, and after the escape of Chiang Kai-shek there did not seem to be much point in resistance. There were less than twenty casualties among Chiang's bodyguard before they capitulated.

Back in Sian, at the Young Marshal's headquarters, an excited group of officials clustered around the telephone. All had gone well in the city, but the great question was the fate of the Generalissimo. About eight o'clock, when the tension was already acute, a call came through from Lintung. The temple had been captured; but Chiang himself had escaped. Something like consternation reigned.

Meantime Sun and his men combed the mountain-side in the grey light of dawn, working upwards over the snow-covered rocks. The Lishan hills are covered with a network of paths: all of these were searched without result. It was obvious that Chiang could not have gone far in such difficult country. Last of all, the searchers tried a valley to the east of the temple: here there were no paths, but only rough outcrops and deep snowdrifts. Before long, shouts from the mountain-side announced a discovery.

Chiang's personal servant had been found; making his way down to the foot of the slope. His master could not be far away.

Half-way up this valley there is a great stone outcrop overhung by a jutting shelf of rock. The place has its history, like every other spot on these ancient hills; it is known as the Hu P'an Shih, or Tiger Rock. And here, hiding in the cleft between rock and mountain, Chiang Kai-shek¹ was at last discovered. He had only a light Chinese gown above his night-clothes, and his bare feet and hands had been torn in his flight through the darkness. Trembling with cold and exhaustion, he crouched against the wet rock. In his ears, perhaps, rang still the sound of shots.

Sun hailed him as "Wei Yuan Chang," using the title of his official rank. There was no irony in the words, though there was irony enough in the situation. But Chiang's response was that of a man who had lost all hope.

"If you are my comrades," he said hoarsely, "shoot me now and finish it all."

"We will not shoot!" said the young captain, with some aplomb. "We only ask you to lead our country against Japan. Then we shall be the first to cheer our Generalissimo." The Tungpei men shouted their agreement.

But Chiang remained on his rock and said with difficulty, "Call Marshal Chang here, and I will come down."

"Marshal Chang is not here," Sun replied. "The troops are rising in the city; we came here to protect you."

¹ *Chieh-shih* (or "Kai-shek"), the given name of the Generalissimo, means "Between Two Stones."



THE DRUM TOWER AT SIAN

This centre of the town was a favourite "site" for anti-Japanese posters



SNOW-COVERED VILLAS AT LINING

It was on the hill in the background that Chiang Kau-shek was captured after escaping in his night-shirt

This was not precisely accurate, but it seemed to relieve the Generalissimo considerably. He called for a horse to carry him down the mountain, for his feet were bleeding and blue with cold.

"There is no horse here," said Sun. "But I will carry you down the mountain on my back." And he knelt in the snow at Chiang's feet.

It was a curious situation, of the kind that rapidly passes into legend in China. After some hesitation the Generalissimo accepted the offer, and climbed painfully on to the broad back of the young officer. Like a modern Saint Christopher, the latter proceeded solemnly down the slope until a servant arrived with Chiang's shoes. The rest of the return was covered on foot.

By this time all was quiet at Huachingkung. The news so eagerly awaited in Sian was telephoned back about nine o'clock. At Chang Hsueh-liang's headquarters the tension of the last few hours relaxed. The coup had succeeded.

Chiang Kai-shek, after his capture, expressed a wish to return to his rooms in the temple. But he was told that these had been wrecked in the fighting and that he would be more comfortable, and safer, in the city. The last point was valid enough. The life of a military dictator is cheap away from his bodyguard.

The little group descended the hill and got into cars at the highway. Chiang was very reserved and refused even the offer of a greatcoat. He did not seem in a mood for conversation. But Sun Ming-chiu wanted very much to talk.

"The past is the past," he remarked. "From now on there must be a new policy for China."

"I am sure," the Generalissimo answered drily, "that Marshal Chang has an excellent policy for China."

"This is a time of national crisis," Sun countered. "We hope the Generalissimo will receive the demands of the people."

"I am always ready to consider the demands of Marshal Chang."

"The one urgent task for China," Sun insisted, "is to resist Japan. This is the united demand of the men of the North-west. Why do you not fight Japan, but instead give the order to fight the Red Army?"

"I never said I would not fight Japan," said Chiang indignantly.

"But the Tungpei army demands that you fight Japan as soon as possible, for their homes have been seized by the enemy, and all China suffers because of their loss."

"I am the leader of the Chinese people," Chiang said firmly. "I represent the nation. I think that my policy is right, not wrong."

"If you represent the Chinese people, why do you not resist Japan? This is the demand of the whole Chinese nation. How can you claim to represent them when you do not carry out their demands?"

This was a simple logic, of a kind that Chiang had not heard perhaps for many years. He might have used very subtle counter-arguments on Kuomintang politicians, but they were not in order here. By this time, some inkling of the real situation seemed to have dawned on him.

"I am a revolutionary," he announced. "I am always ready to sacrifice myself. I have never changed

my views; and even though you hold me prisoner, my spirit will never submit to another's."

Beyond this he would not speak.

There is always something admirable in a pride that will not accept defeat. But the weakness of Chiang's position is seen in this pride: his isolation from criticism, his separation from the common opinions of his own countrymen. To tell the truth to Mussolini to his face, it would probably be necessary to kidnap him. Chiang Kai-shek was not a Fascist dictator (though at one time, perhaps, certain people would have liked to make him into one; and he may not have been himself unwilling). He had retained his own position by a deliberate separation from political cliques, rare public appearances, and a continual delegation of the responsibility for action. But never for a moment, until the Sian affair, had he lost the effective control of so many of the strings that pulled the marionettes. In the brief period of impotence at Sian, he was to learn with something of a shock many things about his own supporters.

And the only justification for Chang Hsueh-liang's action can be this: that there was no other way to make his case publicly before the whole country. It should be clear enough by now that no element of revenge entered into his motives. It would have been easy enough to have left one more body lying on the Lishan hills, before the rattle of musketry had died away. Chiang had enemies enough in the North-west; and many men in China, remembering the massacres at Shanghai and Wuhan and Canton, would have given their lives for the chance that Sun Ming-chiu had that morning by the Hu P'an Shih. But assassina-

tion was not the end of the Sian rising; assassination rarely settles anything, as Chang Hsueh-liang (who had tried it) probably knew; and as Sun Ming-chiu, younger and more impetuous, did not. The Sian mutiny was an armed protest, for no other kind of protest could have been effective. More than this, it was an attempt to bring about a change of national policy which (if it lay within the power of any one man) rested with Chiang Kai-shek alone, as the leader of a united China. Anyway, there were risks enough to be taken; but more would have been lost by the death of Chiang Kai-shek than any kind of revenge could justify.

It was midday before the Generalissimo was brought to his new quarters inside the walls of the "New City," the site of the former T'ang palace in Sian's imperial days, and then the fortress of the Pacification Commissioner, General Yang Hu-cheng. Chiang was very downcast, and asked to be left alone. "You are a very good young man," he told Sun again. "But please leave me now. After all, we have met today for the first time." Shortly after this, the Young Marshal arrived to visit his distinguished captive. He entered ceremoniously, bowing low, and apologising, in those Chinese phrases that sound so strangely in Western ears, for any discomfort or inconvenience his guest might have suffered.

X

THE PRISONER OF SIAN

THE trap had closed, and Chiang Kai-shek was in it. Sian took the news with commendable calm; the arrest of the Generalissimo was a startling enough event, but on the whole it had been done remarkably smoothly. What would happen next was anybody's guess.

Inside Sian martial law reigned all day. Shops put up their shutters; banks were closed; business was at a standstill for a whole morning. But by the afternoon, people were once more moving about the streets, though any group might be stopped and searched by soldiers. There was very little looting, and no panic at all after the first alarm.

Exaggerated accounts from foreigners who were in the city at this time describe a reign of terror, in which no man dared move abroad and no foreigner was safe from assault. The only foundation that possibly existed for these alarmist stories was a tragic incident that occurred early in the morning, when a young German dentist, Dr. Wunsch, left his house against the advice of all his friends and ventured out into the streets. He knew no Chinese; and when he was ordered back at a crossing, did not understand, and walked directly into a line of fire. He was hit by three machine-gun bullets, and was carried back to his house, where he died shortly afterwards. This

most unfortunate accident, which was deeply regretted by the North-western commanders, was made the basis for many quite unwarranted rumours about anti-foreign feeling in Sian, and the danger for foreign residents. The only foreigners who might have been in danger would have been Japanese; and fortunately there were none of these in Sian. At the Guest-house, one hapless Chinese visitor who looked rather like a Japanese was shot through the face before his real nationality was discovered. Some foreigners—especially those staying in the Guest-house—suffered inconvenience; but none appears to have been seriously molested.

To those who read in history the clash of personalities, the most striking feature of the Sian revolt must have seemed the change in Chang Hsueh-liang. That Chang, whose attitude towards Chiang Kai-shek had always been that of pupil to mentor, should ever have dared arrest his "elder brother," and give him (in the piquant phrase that was coined for the occasion) "advice by military force," was in itself surprising enough. By this single stroke, the Young Marshal emerged for the first time as a mature and decisive figure on the Chinese scene. He had always been capable of idealism, as many knew who had come in contact with him in the past; but it had seemed unlikely that his idealism would ever lead to such swift and revolutionary action. It was only the months before Sian that made this action possible.

But with the successful achievement of the coup of December 12th, his real difficulties began. The worst handicap of all was the complete isolation of Sian. Chang, who must have known how open his action would be to misinterpretation, could find no means

of explaining what he was doing to the outside world. A clear example of this is the first message he sent out after the capture of the Generalissimo, which was never reprinted in full in the Chinese Press, and which no foreign correspondent was able to send abroad. If only because this manifesto was so severely censored, it is worth representing here in full. In the authentic accents of Chang Hsueh-liang it shows the real motives behind his action.

As a "Telegram to the Nation," it was addressed to the Central Executive Committee of the National Government, to the various provincial authorities, and to all newspapers and schools:

"EVER SINCE the loss of the North-eastern Provinces five years ago, our national sovereignty has been steadily weakened, and our territory has dwindled day by day. We suffered national humiliation at the time of the Shanghai Truce; and again with the Tangku Truce and the Ho-Umetsu Agreement. There is not a single citizen who does not feel sick at heart because of this.

Recently there have been startling changes in the international situation. Certain Powers are intriguing with one another, and using our nation and our people as a sacrifice.¹ When hostilities began in east Suiyuan, popular resentment reached its height, and our soldiers everywhere were very indignant.

At this juncture, our Central Leader ought to encourage both military and civilians to organise the whole people in a united war of national defence. But while those soldiers at the front endure death and bloodshed in the defence of our national terri-

¹ This is an obvious reference to the signing of the Anti-Communist Pact between Germany and Japan in November 1936. Chang Hsueh-liang was very indignant about this; it was widely believed that Chiang Kai-shek and the Nanking Government must have had some knowledge of it in advance.

tories, the diplomatic authorities are still seeking compromises.

Ever since the unjust imprisonment of the patriotic leaders in Shanghai, the whole world has been startled; the whole of our people has been filled with anger and distress. To love one's country is an offence! This is a terrifying prospect.

Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, surrounded by a group of unworthy advisers, has forfeited the support of the masses of our people. He is deeply guilty for the harm his policies have done the country. We, Chang Hsueh-liang and the others undersigned, advised him with tears to take another way; but we were repeatedly rejected and rebuked.

Not long ago, the students in Sian were demonstrating in their National Salvation movement, and General Chiang set the police to killing these patriotic children. How could anyone with a human conscience bear to do this? We, his colleagues of many years' standing, could not bear to sit still and witness it.

Therefore we have tendered our last advice to Marshal Chiang, while guaranteeing his safety, in order to stimulate his awakening.

The Military and Civilians in the North-west unanimously make the following demands:

1. Reorganise the Nanking Government, and admit all parties to share the joint responsibility of saving the nation.
2. Stop all kinds of civil wars.
3. Immediately release the patriotic leaders arrested in Shanghai.
4. Release all political prisoners throughout the country.
5. Emancipate the patriotic movement of the people.
6. Safeguard the political freedom of the people to organise and call meetings.

7. Actually carry out the Will of Dr. Sun Yat-sen.
8. Immediately call a National Salvation Conference.

The eight items above are the points of National Salvation unanimously maintained by us and by all the Military and Civilians throughout the North-west.

We, therefore, hope that you gentlemen will stoop to meet public sentiment and sincerely adopt these demands, so as to open one line of life for the future, and remedy past mistakes that have been the ruin of the country. The great cause is before us: it does not permit glancing backward. We only hope to carry out the policies here maintained for the liberation and benefit of the country. As to our merit or guilt, we leave this to the judgment of our fellow-countrymen.

In sending this telegram, we urgently await your order.

SIANFU, December 12th, 1936."

This manifesto was signed by Chang Hsueh-liang, Yang Hu-cheng, Yu Hsueh-chung, and a number of commanders from the Tungpei and 17th Route armies. But in addition it was signed by Chiang Ting-wen, Chen Ch'eng, and some of the best-known of Chiang Kai-shek's generals, not to mention Shao Li-tzu, and various officials who were, at the moment, hardly free agents. To use the names of leaders known to be hostile to the very spirit of the manifesto was a tactical error of the first magnitude; it deceived no one, and tended to discredit the motives of the Young Marshal in circles that might have given his programme a favourable reception. Chang was a bad tactician; and many more people saw the list of signatures than ever saw the full text of his telegram.

All manifestoes in China are apt to be rather

emotional in tone. But there can be no question of the sincerity of the sentiments expressed in this document. And the eight demands, which came to be known as the "Eight-Point Programme," were both progressive and democratic. The first point, of course, foreshadowed the reunion of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party, after an open breach and civil war for nearly ten years. The seventh point referred particularly to those clauses in Sun Yat-sen's will recommending co-operation between China and all friendly foreign nations who were prepared to treat her as an equal. For the rest, the demands for a wider political freedom were of a kind that had long been desired by liberal and democratic elements throughout China, though not for many years had they been so openly or dramatically expressed.

In Chiang Kai-shek the North-west held the trump card. It was all very well for Nanking to condemn such unconstitutional methods of procedure; there were no constitutional methods, as Chang Hsueh-liang knew very well. His best chance in these early days was to reassure people as to the Generalissimo's safety, and try to arouse the widest possible support for his Eight-Point Programme in other parts of the country. As it happened, he met with only partial success along both these lines.

The first news of Chiang's capture came as such a shock, and with so many lurid and alarming rumours, that few people were prepared to accept the sincerity of the Young Marshal and his associates. The only way to verify it, of course, was by direct contact with the "rebels." But this is just what Nanking refused to consider. It was left for Mr. W. H. Donald, the

Australian adviser to the Generalissimo, and personal friend of Chang Hsueh-liang, to make the first trip to Sian on the Monday after the coup. Having reassured himself as to the safety and personal comfort of the prisoner, Mr. Donald sent messages to this effect to Nanking; on the same day, Chang Hsueh-liang telegraphed again to the Government, inviting any official representative with adequate powers to come to Sian and discuss the whole question of a change of national policy along the lines suggested by the Eight-Point Programme. If satisfactory assurances were given that civil war would not be waged by the Government on the North-west, Chang was prepared at this stage to release the Generalissimo.

But no one came from Nanking, which seemed to see no possible solution but war.

The military situation was complicated. On December 13th the Tungpei troops at Lanchow, capital of Kansu, had taken their cue from the events of the day before, and revolted against the control of the Central Government. This put military power in that province in the hands of Yu Hsueh-chang (who flew back to Lanchow from Sian shortly after the coup) and his lieutenant, Chio Chun-cheng. Hu Chung-nan, the Nanking general who had been so badly defeated by the Reds in Kansu three weeks before and had withdrawn to the south-east, found himself isolated with his First Army in a very difficult position near Tiensui. There were other Nanking troops in north Shensi under Kao Kwei-sze and Kao Shuang-chen; but the Red Army could look after them. If Nanking was to make any effective attack, it must be along the Lunhai railway from Tungkwan. Military

operations against the North-west, it was clear, would be no slight or easy matter.

While Nanking breathed vengeance and civil war, it studiously refrained from giving a hearing to Chang Hsueh-liang's case. But in Sian, daily mass meetings were held in streets and parks to celebrate the new political freedom in the North-west. At a meeting in the Revolutionary Park on December 16th, the Young Marshal and Yang Hu-cheng together "gave reasons," in the traditional manner, for the arrest and detention of the Generalissimo. At this time Chang Hsueh-liang made a very complete statement of his own position. Among other things he said: "For my own viewpoint: I have had close personal relationships with General Chiang in the past. Our serious disagreement was over his policy towards Japanese imperialism. In the past year I wrote and spoke to him often, arguing with him to give up a policy which he pursued in defiance of the will of the people. He rejected all my pleas.

"Recently, General Chiang arrested and imprisoned seven of our National Salvation leaders in Shanghai. . . . Most of these men I do not even know; but I protested at their arrest, because their principles are the same as mine. I said to General Chiang: 'Your cruelty in dealing with the patriotic movement of the people is exactly the same as that of Yuan Shih-k'ai and Chang Tsung-chang.' Generalissimo Chiang answered: 'That is merely your personal viewpoint. *I am the Government.* My action was that of a revolutionary.'

"Fellow-countrymen, I leave it to you to decide whether this was a satisfactory answer! Because General Chiang refused to turn our guns against the

enemy, but reserved them for use against our own people, I was finally forced to unite with General Yang Hu-cheng and all the leaders of the people of the North-west in the revolutionary action of December 12th. I seek no gain, no territory for myself. Instead, I wish to stand with all our armed comrades at the front, fighting to the death against Japanese imperialism."

It is always difficult to translate into a foreign idiom the highly emotional language of Chinese political speeches. Overcharged with sentiment, highly figurative, they recall more the passionate eloquence of a Lamartine than the cautious utterances of our modern statesmen, or the tongue-tied platitudes of Geneva. But the speeches and statements of Chang Hsueh-liang in the days after the Sian revolt, in spite of their naïveté—or perhaps because of it—bear the unmistakeable accents of sincerity. An accomplished diplomat may form such phrases for effect: but Chang Hsueh-liang was no diplomat. His collected speeches, letters, and broadcasts, which were published in Sian early in the New Year, are an amazing record. If they had ever been made public to the whole Chinese nation, it is possible that the first verdict on Sian might have been very different.

In his enforced seclusion in Chang Hsueh-liang's modern quarters (where he had been taken after the first day) Chiang Kai-shek did not lack visitors. The Young Marshal talked with him every day; Yang Hu-cheng and other military leaders came to discuss with him, persuasively or vehemently, the fate of China. Chiang's first reaction to all this advice—it is easy enough to understand—was mere exasperation.

But one day came other visitors, quiet and composed, whose features were no less familiar to the Generalissimo in captivity. They were a reminder, perhaps, "of eyes he dared not meet in dreams."

. . . Turn back ten years, to the beginning of the "Great Revolution" that Sun Yat-sen did not live to see. Chiang Kai-shek, an able young executive, was winning a name for himself as President of the Whampoa Military Academy, which Sun Yat-sen had established, with Russian advisers, as the training-school for the National Revolutionary Army. Military instructor at Whampoa, later Commander of Chiang's own 21st Division, was a youth of twenty-two called Yeh Chien-ying. Head of the political department at Whampoa, and already a thorn in the flesh of its ambitious president, was a young Communist not long returned from study in France and Germany. His name was Chou En-lai.

1927, and the Nationalist armies, under Chiang Kai-shek as Commander-in-Chief, had occupied Nanking. Shanghai—the heart of China and Far Eastern focus of world imperialism—was still in the hands of reactionary war-lords, guarded by the guns of foreign cruisers. To Shanghai, Chou En-lai was sent to organise an insurrection; in the first months nearly a million workers came out in a general strike. The strike was suppressed, but not yet the revolution. Chou and his comrades—Chao Tse-yen, Ku Shun-chang, Lo Yi-ming—trained pickets and cadres, armed a desperate band of three hundred workers. On March 21st another general strike closed the mills of Shanghai; against the most amazing odds, the arsenal was captured and the Chinese city passed into the hands of the insurrectionists. Five thousand

workers were armed, and Chiang Kai-shek, arriving with the Revolutionary army a few days later, found his battle won for him.

All the world knows the sequel: it has been made the theme of one of the finest of modern revolutionary novels.¹ Chiang Kai-shek had learnt how to make his peace with the Shanghai bankers and the foreign interests; within a month the workers' army had been disarmed and the massacre began. This was the precise moment at which the split between the Right Kuomintang and the Left (which included the Communists) developed into open warfare.

When five thousand of his fellow-revolutionaries, and the friends he had worked with most closely, perished in the suppression of the Shanghai rising, Chou En-lai, who had been among the first arrested and condemned, escaped to Wuhan through the help of an old Whampoa friend. His fate from that time was the fate of the revolution. He was in each successive rising: Nanchang, when Chu Teh formed the first Red Army; Swatow, when for the last time the Communists tried to hold a seaport; and that most desperate venture of all, the Canton Commune. Here he came together again with Yeh Chien-ying; after the collapse of the Commune, the latter escaped to Moscow and remained there for two years. In 1931 both succeeded in reaching the Soviet district in Kiangsi and Fukien, and they had been with the Red Army ever since.

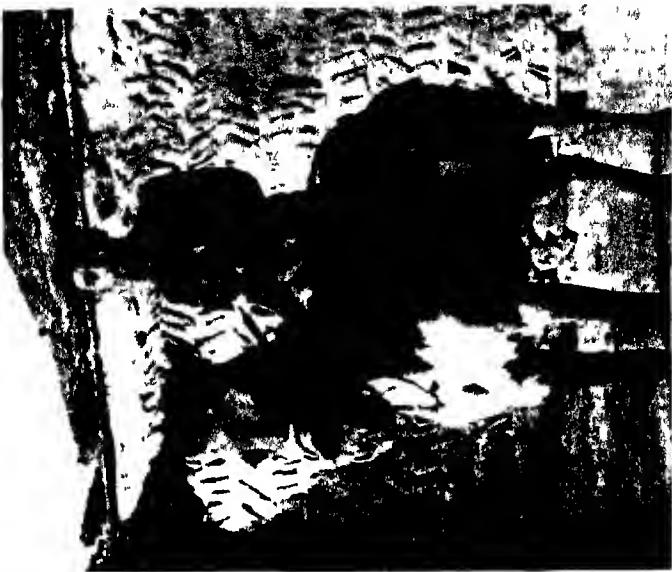
Now in Sian, when they met with Chiang Kai-shek again, and not as strangers, Chou was Political Commissar of the First Front Red Army, Deputy Chair-

¹ *La Condition humaine*, by André Malraux (translated into English under the title *Storm in Shanghai*).

man of the Revolutionary Military Council, with a price of \$80,000 on his head. Yeh was Chief of Staff of the Reds' East Front Army. It was an interesting reunion.

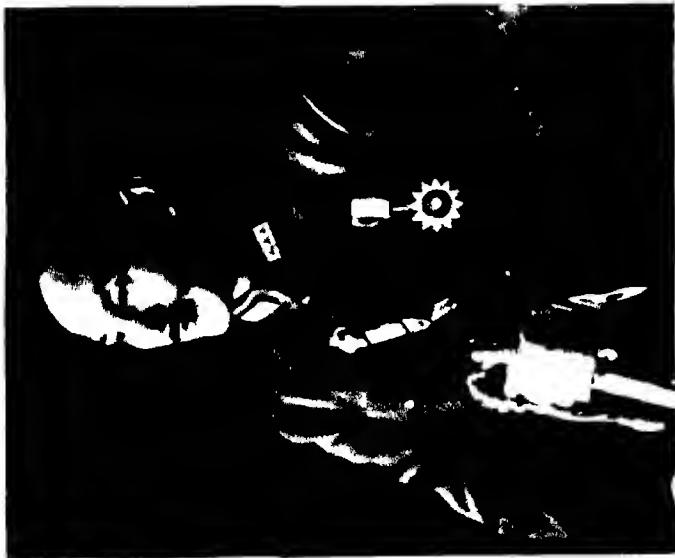
What part did the Communists play in the Sian affair? Contrary to general belief, they had nothing at all to do with the capture of Chiang Kai-shek. There was certainly a good working understanding between the Reds in the North-west and Chang Hsueh-liang. But the initiative in the events of December 12th came from the Young Marshal and his group of Tungpei "radicals." There were no Communists present at the night meeting which planned the coup; the Chinese Soviet headquarters at Pao An, in north Shensi, knew nothing of the plan until they heard, with unconcealed rejoicings, of the arrest of the Generalissimo. Naturally enough it was a situation that they were eager to turn to their own advantage. And they did not have to wait long for an opportunity.

Immediately after the mutiny, the Young Marshal sent a plane to the North to bring representatives of the Soviet Government to Sian. They were invited to take part officially in the negotiations and organisation in the "rebel" capital, where a new authority was formed in what was called the Military Council of the United Anti-Japanese Armies of the North-west. The small Communist delegation which arrived in Sian, unaccompanied by any Red Army forces, was—as it proved—to exert an influence which effectively determined the whole course of the movement in the North-west. It included Po Ku—bespectacled, owlish, slow-spoken—a former Secretary of the Communist Party and one of its



CHOU FN-JAI, POLITICIAN AND COMMISSIONER OF THE
FIRST FRONT RED ARMY

(By courtesy of the Daily Herald)



GENERALISSIMO CHIANG KAI-SHEK
"I am the Government"

best theoreticians; Chou En-lai, Yeh Chien-ying, and a few others. Of them all, Chou En-lai, the Political Commissar and former assistant to Chiang Kai-shek, was to play the most prominent part in the weeks that followed.

The official attitude of the Chinese Communist Party to the rising is stated in a circular telegram issued by the Central Soviet Government at Pao An on December 19th, in which they state their belief that "the Sian leaders acted from patriotic sincerity and zeal, wishing speedily to formulate a national policy of immediate resistance to Japan." This telegram proposed the convention of a Peace Conference in Nanking, in which all parties in the country should be represented, and recommended a truce between the armies of Sian and Nanking, with Tungkwan as the dividing line. As one of the few sensible suggestions put forward at this time, it received, of course, no consideration whatever.

Instead, Nanking rushed troops to Tungkwan; and a number of towns were bombed. A fleet of Government planes roared low over the roofs of Sian, and the sound of their engines cannot have been very reassuring to the Young Marshal's prisoner. After those hours on the hillside above Lintung, some of Chiang's worst moments must have been in captivity, when he—like the rest of Sian—waited for the first air-raid.

It has been said that certain elements among the rebels (more particularly the Communists) wanted to bring the Generalissimo to a public trial and condemn him by mass vote to death. If anyone had a cause for such action it was surely the Chinese Com-

munists. But in point of fact the Communists were the most resolute "peace party" from the first; and Chou En-lai the most successful advocate for Chiang Kai-shek's release. This was a purely tactical move, as the Communists are the first to admit; but at least they deserve the credit for knowing their own policy, and holding to it. There were certain groups and individuals, especially among the Tungpei left wing, who were in favour of Chiang's death: but they were unorganised and powerless, so long as he was held in Chang Hsueh-liang's headquarters.

How Chiang Kai-shek spent his time in captivity is not told. After his release he published privately a diary of his fourteen days of detention, but this was frankly for official consumption and cannot be considered exact. By his own account he spent many hours reading his Bible—a traditional, if unoriginal, way of passing the time. What is certain is that, between visits and conversation, he had ample leisure for reflection. And the developing situation, as we shall see, gave him food for thought.

This is a documentary chapter, so it may not come amiss to conclude it with some extracts from a private telegram sent out by Chang Hsueh-liang on December 19th and addressed to Mr. Fraser, China correspondent of the London *Times*. The telegram, needless to say, was stopped by the censor at Nanking and did not reach its address for many weeks. It is a typical reaction to some of the first editorial comments on the Sian incident abroad, and shows again the fatal handicap of isolation under which the "rebels" laboured.

"I have read the scathing, but happily incorrect

allegations which *The Times* editorially uses in condemnation of me for the detention of the Generalissimo. I know too, that condemnation will be world-wide because of the lack of knowledge of the circumstances that led up to that detention, or the actual reasons for it. I do not for one moment defend forceful detention of anyone, and certainly not in the case of a person in the high position of the Generalissimo. Therefore I deeply regret that special circumstances which I do not, at this moment, care to touch on, constrained me to act.

There was no 'cherishing of personal or predatory ambition,' as *The Times* charges, or 'hopes of extracting better terms' in this connection; or anything personal motivating the action ending in the detention of the Generalissimo. It came from a simple effort to have assurances that the policy of China would be revised definitely to take up arms in defence of our country, and to have a positive end put to the tremendous wastage of millions of Chinese money, Chinese lives, and Chinese property involved in incessant civil wars, and the perpetual pursuit of so-called bandits, who are still Chinese despite their views; and who, at worst, are not a menace to the country as are the Japanese. . . .

I have been blamed, and have not shirked responsibility; but I am not the Central Government, and therefore I am unable to commit this country to war. . . . But above all, we want to see the forces of China being used against an invading foe, and not against the Chinese people. The national army has not been moved one step against Japan, but as swift as thought we see it being mobilised now against me, while the enemy is within the country. . . .

We desire the leadership of the Generalissimo, and do not wish his powers curtailed in any way. . . . When the regrettable steps developed that led to his sudden detention, there was no menace to his life,

no move to depose or interfere with his position, which is, in our eyes, still that of Generalissimo. . . . His prolonged stay here is not of our doing.

I telegraphed last Monday night welcoming anyone to come from Nanking to hear the Generalissimo's views, and arrange with him for the necessary safeguards to prevent the development of civil warfare. . . . Ever since then, he has been waiting in vain, as have we, for someone to arrive from Nanking competent to deal with the matter, so that the Generalissimo can return to the capital and resume his duties. It is a strange thing that there has been this delay; had someone come, he could have returned to Nanking some days ago.

However, he is waiting, he is respected, he is unmolested, and Mr. Donald lives with him in a modern house uninterfered with by anyone. And when he does return to Nanking I am prepared, if a dispassionate and fair trial is possible, to go with him to stand before the nation. If, after hearing all the facts, they condemn me as having done wrong, then I will take the punishment meted out, be it even a sentence of death.

CHANG HSUEH-LIANG"

Believe it all, or believe none of it; diplomatic telegrams are always to be taken with a certain amount of reserve. But while those most familiar with Chinese affairs have learnt to take few public statements at their face value, the facts mentioned in this telegram are substantially accurate. There is money involved in every transaction in China, because money is a sign of good faith. But Chang Hsueh-liang had money enough; he did not need to go to war to get more. The ransom he wanted for Chiang Kai-shek—and, after all, there was nothing that could guarantee it to him—was a new policy for China.

XI

MEN OF GOODWILL

How had things been faring at Nanking in all this? While Chiang Kai-shek read his Bible in his "prison" in Sian, and talked with the persuasive Chou En-lai, the national crisis had turned a searchlight on some dark corners in the political warren of the capital.

The first news from Sian had been a severe shock to the Kuomintang bureaucracy. Nanking was more used to talk than to action. There were some able men in the Government (and many more outside it); but very few of these had been used to full executive authority. It is characteristic that in the first meetings called to discuss the emergency, many hours were spent in argument about procedure and "face." Finally, Dr. H. H. Kung, Minister of Finance, an American-trained liberal with some democratic sympathies, was appointed in the Generalissimo's place as Acting President of the Executive Yuan.

Dr. Kung had considerable personal influence, for he belonged to the "Soong Dynasty," that extraordinary family hierarchy that has at times completely dominated Chinese domestic politics. He had married Soong Ai-ling, by general consent the shrewdest and most business-like of the three remarkable sisters who made such surprisingly different marriages. Soong Mei-ling, the youngest of the three, as the wife of the Generalissimo, has come more and

more to the forefront of public life in China, her tact and familiarity with Western ways proving an invaluable support to the Head of a Government who knew no foreign language: while Soong Ching-ling, the widow of Sun Yat-sen, has lived in these last years in seclusion and separation from her family. At times (as during the Shanghai strike, when the National Salvation leaders were arrested) driven into hiding because of her Leftist sympathies, Madame Sun Yat-sen has always been loyal to the ideals of her husband, and has kept alive something of the tradition of the Left Kuomintang. The most haunting figure of the Chinese Revolution, she has remained by her beauty and her undaunted spirit the inspiration of all the progressive elements of Young China.

But Dr. Kung in his new position seems to have forgotten for the time being most of his liberalism. It had so often been said that the Nanking Government was merely the façade of a dictatorship, that the chief concern of Kuomintang officials at this time seems to have been to assure the world that they could get on well enough without Chiang Kai-shek. Kung made long speeches over the radio, asserting that there could be no dealings with armed rebellion, no truce with the "Communist-bandits"; and assuring the nation that the dignity of the Government would certainly be upheld, even if it meant wiping out the rebels by force (and the Generalissimo and some of the ablest members of his military staff along with them). In spite of this impressive "solidarity," it seems clear that Nanking was pretty badly demoralised. And the reason is not far to seek.

It had been the policy of Chiang Kai-shek to ap-

point to the various ministries men whose qualifications seemed adequate to their posts but who would be unlikely to have any very strong or challenging ideas of their own. In matters of important policy, the final decision always remained with Chiang himself. This system had obvious advantages for a military dictator, and equally obvious disadvantages for the nation as a whole. But, after a fashion, it had worked: and there can be no doubt that the increasing confidence and trust in the Nanking Government displayed in recent years by foreign Powers had been largely due to confidence in the strength and ability of Chiang Kai-shek.

But ambitions will flourish even in the breasts of disgruntled bureaucrats; and there were notoriously many cliques and factions in the depressing and untidy capital of Nanking. These cliques are familiar enough by name in China, though it is likely that any detailed analysis of them would convey very little to the ordinary onlooker. Besides, the composition and alignment of the different groups is constantly shifting, offering a bewildering maze to the student of Chinese politics. It may be convenient here to adopt a simplification (very popular in Sian at the time of the rising) and refer to the "pro-Japanese" and "anti-Japanese" cliques.

The names call for immediate qualification. Any Chinese, it might be supposed, and even a politician, would be generally "anti-Japanese" at this stage of China's troubled history. But the term as it is used today belongs by right to those political leaders who favour a policy of active resistance to Japanese encroachment; a policy of non-co-operation, at the least, until some of China's more obvious grievances

receive redress. Under this head might be gathered some of the Chinese names best known abroad. T. V. Soong, H. H. Kung, Sun Fo (son of Dr. Sun Yat-sen), Wang Chung-hui, and others, are usually associated with what is called the "O Mei Pai," or "Europe-America Group." They are men trained abroad, for the most part, with progressive ideas, and a friendly feeling towards the democratic nations, notably England and America and France. Unfortunately, at the time of the Sian crisis, the O Mei Pai was somewhat in eclipse, only two of its members—Dr. Kung and Sun Fo—holding office. But there were other groups, liberal or social-democratic in character, which would support the same general line if given the opportunity.

On the other side (for there is a really valid distinction here) were certain elements, chiefly militarist, who had gained power under the direct patronage of Chiang Kai-shek. Their political strength had not yet been measured, for they had kept very quiet under the shelter of absolute loyalty to the Generalissimo. The best-defined group was what was known as the "Whampoa Hsi," or Military Academy clique, relying for active support on the officers of the National Army. This group, as it happened, was in a particularly strong position in December of 1936.

Among these, then, who were given the unflattering title of "pro-Japanese," might be listed some who had been in very close contact with the Generalissimo. These were men like Ho Ying-ching, Minister of War, graduate from a Japanese military academy, and for many years chief organiser of the Anti-Red campaigns; Chang Chun, Foreign Minister, a former schoolmate of Chiang Kai-shek in a military academy

in Japan; Chang Kung-chuan, Minister of Transport, and Hsiung Shih-hui, member of the Military Commission. None of these was particularly formidable in himself: but together they represented a definite policy of co-operation with Japan rather than resistance, and an implacable hostility towards the Chinese Communists and the very idea of a United Front. It was these men, led by Ho Ying-chin, who were suspected in many parts of China (and not only in the North-west) of wishing to turn the Sian situation to their own advantage by getting rid of the Generalissimo and seizing political power.

Ho Ying-chin, as Minister of War, was put in charge of the punitive expedition so swiftly organised against the Sian rebels; and it was he who sent the invitation to Wang Ching-wei, shoddy Robespierre of the Chinese Revolution, to return immediately to China from Europe. Wang Ching-wei, who has a record of political treachery unsurpassed even in China, was known to have close relations with Japan; from Europe he cabled an eager acceptance, finding time to have an interview with Hitler before he left. With Chiang Kai-shek out of the way, the ex-Premier saw a heaven-sent opportunity to head a Government based on the military connections of the Whampoa Hsi, and actively supported by Japan and the contracting parties of the "Anti-Communist Pact." The news that Wang Ching-wei was returning, with which the Sian leaders did not delay to acquaint their prisoner, must have been distinctly unpalatable to Chiang Kai-shek. The two were old rivals: there was hardly room in China for both of them.

Chiang's own position in relation to these Nanking

factions was peculiar. He had remained aloof from "party politics," preferring to work with any one or more of the Nanking groups, or play one group off against another, to suit his general strategy. In the last months before Sian he was certainly closest, however, with the military clique; and people like Feng Yu-hsiang and Sun Fo, who were known to take an active interest in the National Salvation movement and to favour an alliance with Soviet Russia against Japan, had been rather under suspicion since the arrests in Shanghai in November and the new wave of reaction. There were signs, moreover, that the secret Blue Shirt organisation (the "Lan I Shih," which it is very impolite to mention openly in China, but which had existed for some years as a semi-Fascist terrorist party, strongly nationalistic, fanatically anti-Communist, and formerly taking its orders directly from the Generalissimo) was getting rather out of hand. It was widely believed that Yang Yung-tai, Governor of Hupeh province, who was assassinated in October 1936, was a victim of the Blue Shirts; and Yang had been one of Chiang Kai-shek's very closest friends and advisers. Clearly the Generalissimo could not have approved of his death—though he might not have felt the same resentment towards the attempt on the life of Wang Ching-wei the year before.

Altogether, then, it might be said that, at the time of his capture in Sian, the Generalissimo was not very sure just who, at Nanking, were his friends. And the course of events after December 12th must have given him some stimulating ideas on this subject.

For Nanking flatly refused to enter into any

negotiations with Sian and pushed ahead with the attack on the rebels. The venerable Yu Yu-jen, indeed, set out for Shensi in a luxurious private car, where he wished to interview Feng Ching-tsai and buy over that defaulter from the North-west. But the fate of Chiang Kai-shek seems to have left Nanking singularly unmoved.

Hostilities had broken out to the east of Sian shortly after the coup, and spasmodic actions continued for several days. Nanking planes bombed a number of towns along the Lunghai railway, and squadrons of bombers flew in formation over Sian itself. But no provocation was given by the rebels, who contented themselves with preparations for the defence of Sian.

On December 18th, General Chiang Ting-wen, a right-hand man of the Generalissimo, was released from Sian, and flew to Nanking with an autographed letter from his chief to Ho Ying-chin. This letter stated that Chiang Kai-shek expected to return to the capital within a week; meantime he asked that hostilities, and especially bombing operations, be suspended.

Madame Chiang Kai-shek, in her account of the Sian crisis, has vividly described the atmosphere in military circles at Nanking during these hectic days. Almost single-handed she was struggling against what she characterises as "an unhealthy obsession on the part of leading military officers, who asserted that they felt it their inexorable duty to mobilise the military machine forthwith, and launch an immediate punitive expedition to attack Sian." Ho Ying-chin, as Minister of War, had taken over control of the air force; and Loyang, an important military centre in Honan, was an excellent base for an attack on the

Shensi capital. As it appears, it was only a series of accidents, and the unremitting efforts of Madame Chiang and her personal friends, which prevented an air-raid on Sian.

For the war-mongers at Nanking would hear no talk of restraint, and even accused Mr. Donald of "taking the side" of Chang Hsueh-liang and falsifying the facts in his reassuring reports from Shensi. In the same spirit of intransigence they refused at first to accept the Generalissimo's letter, brought by Chian Ting-wen. They had prevented Madame Chiang Kai-shek from flying to Sian (her first impulse on hearing the news from Donald), and they similarly tried to prevent her brother, Mr. T. V. Soong (former Finance Minister, and one of the ablest administrators who has ever held office under the Nanking Government), from following up Chang Hsueh-liang's invitation. Soong finally managed to outmanœuvre official objections by saying that he would go to Sian merely as a private citizen, and left by plane on December 19th.

Two days later both Soong and Donald had returned to Nanking, bringing every hope of a peaceful settlement and the speedy release of the Generalissimo. And at this Madame Chiang refused to wait any longer, but insisted on accompanying them back to Sian on the morning of the 22nd.

T. V. Soong succeeded in getting a guarantee of three more days of truce from the military authorities in Nanking; and in those three days feverish negotiations went on in Sianfu for the release of the Generalissimo. The knowledge which Madame Chiang and her brother had of the mood of the capital, and of the danger of the war party taking things into their own

hands, added a desperate urgency to their mission. It should be emphasised here that none of these private negotiators was an official member of the Nanking Government. Any guarantees or promises they might make could only be of a private nature, and could not commit the Central Government. But the personal influence of T. V. Soong and Madame Chiang—not to mention the Generalissimo himself—could be very great.

The most interesting and ironical feature of these days was certainly the official attitude of Nanking. So far from assisting in securing the release and safety of the Generalissimo, they placed every obstacle in the way of those who were pleading for the chance to negotiate, not merely as relatives and friends, but as Chinese citizens who realized how much was at stake. If Madame Chiang Kai-shek had been less resolute, it seems likely that the midwinter of 1936–37 might have been marred by catastrophe—the death of the one Chinese leader who could command national support, and the beginning of a civil war which could only have proved disastrous. Some tribute seems in order here to a few people who kept their heads at a time when many others appeared in a less favourable light.

For an account of those last three days in Sian before the Generalissimo's release, told by one who was intimately concerned in what happened, Madame Chiang's own story must claim attention. But the emphasis there is personal, as was only natural. We have seen that Chang Hsueh-liang was prepared almost from the start to release the Generalissimo and accompany him back to Nanking, if satisfactory

assurances could be given against a renewal of civil war. Madame Chiang describes a situation in which "Hanchen," himself sincerely repentant about his precipitate action in arresting Chiang Kai-shek, pleaded desperately with his associates to permit the Generalissimo's release. Perhaps this picture does less than justice to the real degree of co-operation which existed at this time between the various groups at Sian. But it is important to have the statement, on Madame Chiang's own authority, that "no question of money or increased power or position was at any time brought up" by the Sian leaders.

The great mystery for most outside observers was the release of Chiang Kai-shek. It seemed to show a change of front on the part of the North-western leaders which could only be explained in terms of some fabulous ransom. And it is just here that Madame Chiang's story of the shamefaced attitude of the Young Marshal, and his suggestion to smuggle the Generalissimo out from Sian, is least convincing. In her story Chiang Kai-shek himself plays a purely passive part; and everyone else, with the possible exception of Chang Hsueh-liang, thinks only of saving his own head. There was rather more to it all than this.

One point may be regarded as definitely established. The capture of Chiang Kai-shek was not inspired by personal ambition or private feud. It was a political move designed to effect a change of policy in China, and provoked by the imminent prospect of a renewed large-scale campaign against the Red Armies in the North-west. The policy advocated by the "rebels" is sufficiently clear from the Eight-Point Programme. If the Generalissimo would agree even

in principle to the change of policy suggested, there was no longer any point in holding him captive and risking a "civil war to end civil war."

Consider for a moment the explanation of Chiang's release offered inside Sian itself. The Generalissimo and the friends who visited him in Sian agreed to give favourable consideration to the Young Marshal's programme. Hence the danger of civil war, which the uncompromising attitude of the Nanking militarists had brought so near, was best averted by a speedy release of Chiang Kai-shek and his staff, who were the only people who could control the military machine at Nanking. As a pledge of his own sincerity, and to show that he recognised his responsibility to the nation, Chang Hsueh-liang insisted on accompanying his late captive to Nanking.

This sounds as simple as a fairy-tale: but it is the clear pattern of the events. A more realistic analysis will reveal some of the reasons for so much magnanimity.

No one (least of all, those who knew him) believes that, in his captivity at Sian, Chiang Kai-shek experienced a complete "change of heart." But as an intelligent man he was open to conviction, and could appreciate the strength of an argument—especially when it vitally affected his own political position.

From Chou En-lai, whom he had reason, from past experience, to respect, Chiang learnt that the Chinese Communists were prepared to co-operate fully with the Nanking Government, in return for certain assurances. They would change the name of their army, make the Soviet area in the North-west a "special district" inside the Republic, and give

pledges not to continue with a programme of agrarian and social revolution until the National Front against Japan was realised. This was a fair enough offer of peace and unity from a tough and hitherto indomitable element of Chinese society.

Madame Chiang's only reference to the Communists in her account of these last days in Sian is of first-rate importance. "All this time" (she writes) "we heard nothing of menaces from the Reds. Quite contrary to outside beliefs, we were assured that they were not interested in detaining the Generalissimo. Instead, they preferred his quick release." This statement is fully supported by the facts. The whole influence of the Communists was turned in the direction of a swift and peaceful settlement. Chou En-lai was a very persuasive spokesman, and it is only reasonable to suppose that his offers made some impression on Chiang Kai-shek. From a purely practical standpoint, the Generalissimo may have reasoned that it would be less trouble for himself, and infinitely cheaper for the Government, to come to some agreement with the Reds rather than continue with costly campaigns against them, which were (his position in Sian was a constant reminder of it) obviously growing more and more unpopular.

The Young Marshal continued to press his familiar case for the cessation of civil war and the organisation of effective resistance to Japan. He made no attempt to back this with threats. Extremist elements in Sian may have been in favour of an open trial of Chiang Kai-shek, and a mass verdict upon his life; but no opportunity was ever given to them. When Chang found that the Communists were in favour of Chiang's release, he seems to have felt himself free to act. But

of course he could act only after consultation with all his associates.

Beyond question the deciding factor in Chiang's release was the attitude of Nanking, and the danger of a pro-Fascist, "pro-Japanese" group emerging with full political power in China. This was a point that Chiang himself was not likely to miss, for the very people whom the "rebels" had warned him against were those who now seemed to be conspiring to destroy him. Chang Hsueh-liang had protected him from the extremists in Sian, and the Communists had throughout argued in favour of his release. Only in Nanking, where he might have expected to find his most loyal supporters, was a group which appeared determined to force a war which must inevitably cost him and his staff their lives. When he heard the roar of the Nanking planes overhead, Chiang must have known that he was in greater danger from Ho Ying-chin and his bombers than from his captors in Sian.

No one—except those who hoped to gain from Chiang's death—really wanted civil war. If fighting had broken out on a major scale, this would have played straight into the hands of the Japanese. The military clique would have seized power at Nanking, and Japan would probably have had a free hand in North China. It was to the advantage of all genuinely patriotic elements to avoid war at all costs, and only one unscrupulous section—a minority which held certain key posts—was bent on making war. This was the situation produced by the predicament of a single man. And the effect of it was certainly not wasted on him.

Chang Hsueh-liang, for his part, had probably counted on more open support than he got from

other regions in China. In the event of serious warfare other militarists in the North and South-west would certainly have intervened, and some of them on the side of the North-west. But by this time the damage might have been done; if Chiang Kai-shek were once removed from the scene, it would have been difficult to achieve even the semblance of unity again. Chang Hsueh-liang seems to have decided that the risk was not worth taking: and he was almost certainly right. What had begun as, first and foremost, an anti-Japanese movement, might result in a situation objectively favourable to Japan's dearest wish—the continued disunity of China.

Many people in Sian who were in favour of the ultimate release of the Generalissimo would have demanded some public pledge or agreement from him first. It is very doubtful if this could ever have been procured: Chiang Kai-shek was a proud man. In any case it could only have been an embarrassment to him, and would have been an obvious red rag to Japan. Anything that is done at all in China is done indirectly; the goodwill of the Generalissimo, of Madame Chiang, and T. V. Soong, was worth more than any document obtained under duress.

Christmas Day arrived, and the "Soong truce" expired with it. The danger of an air-attack on Sian was greater than ever, and the pleas for the release of the Generalissimo were redoubled. Comforted (as she relates) in the early morning by the friendly apparition of a Father Christmas, Madame Chiang was more eloquent than ever on the subject of peace on earth to men of goodwill. Chang Hsueh-liang, most impressionable of rebels, was the chief target of these entreaties. His chivalry was on test: he had taken re-

sponsibility for the life of the Generalissimo, and had protected him so far against hostile elements. But he could not protect him against the bombs of his own War Minister or the indignation of a threatened populace.

The Young Marshal, knowing that he had the support of the Communists, seems to have taken the final decision on his own responsibility. Early in the afternoon he rang up Yang Hu-cheng and informed his astonished colleague that he was himself flying the Generalissimo back to Loyang. Short notice was advisable, for "Bandit Yang" was made of tougher material and had an unforgiving nature. But Yang apparently gave his consent to the arrangement. Any other alternative would have involved risks too great to be faced.

As it was, the trip to the aerodrome had its hazards. That afternoon there had been a rumour that Fu Tso-yi, commander of the Chinese defending forces in Suiyuan, was arriving by plane. At the air-port a considerable crowd had gathered.

Towards four o'clock two cars drove rapidly through the gates, past the waiting crowd and on to the field. Dumbfounded, some onlookers thought that they recognised, in the slight figure huddled in the back seat of the first car, the pale features and black moustache of the Generalissimo.

The whisper ran through the group of spectators. It could not be true. If it had reached the ears of some young officers who had sworn a blood-pact that Chiang would never leave Sian alive, there would certainly have been more violence in the Shensi capital. But the car drove close up beside Marshal

Chang's giant American plane, and the departure was made as expeditious as possible.

The "official" account of Chiang Kai-shek's leave-taking mentions an impressive ceremony in which the Generalissimo gravely rebuked Chang Hsueh-liang and Yang Hu-cheng, and delivered a notable homily on the evils of insubordination. This speech, as copied down in shorthand by Madame Chiang, ran to several pages. It has already been made a model text for study in Chinese middle-schools.

But it is difficult to see just where and when such a speech was delivered. By the most circumstantial accounts, Chiang Kai-shek did not stay upon the order of his going. When the party reached the plane, it is said, the Generalissimo was at first afraid to enter it, believing that he might be flown to the Soviet area. But the Young Marshal got in before him, and Chiang did not delay for courtesies, or to point any moral.

A well-confirmed report, however, describes the Generalissimo's parting words more simply and realistically. "We have both made mistakes in the past," he said from the plane to Yang Hu-cheng and the other officials who had accompanied him. "My own mistakes I freely acknowledge. From the 12th of December until today, while I was here as a prisoner, the responsibility for civil war rested with you. From now on that responsibility is mine. I want no more civil war in China."

Shortly after four o'clock on that Christmas Day, the great Boeing plane took off for Loyang bearing the Generalissimo to safety, and the Young Marshal to an uncertain future. For Chang Hsueh-liang the release

of his prisoner was only complete when he himself returned with him to "receive punishment." Friends in Sian, and even (it seems) Chiang Kai-shek, advised him that this last action was unnecessary. Nothing but danger could await him in Nanking.

But there was still a romantic streak in Chang Hsueh-liang which probably rather enjoyed the impression he was making. His great idea, of course (and this is genuinely in character), was to prove beyond any question his own sincerity in the Sian coup. It was the gesture of Coriolanus; and there was no guarantee at this time that it might not have led to a similar fate.

From the plane Chiang Kai-shek began to put his parting promise into effect. Orders were given to the Central troops inside Shensi to withdraw to the east of Tungkwan, across the borders of the "rebel" province. Before darkness fell on the evening of that day, troops had evacuated Hwahsien and marched twenty *li* to the east. The challenge from Nanking seemed to have passed.

The next day, a little after noon, Chiang Kai-shek's aeroplane landed at the air-port of Nanking. Great crowds gave him a tumultuous welcome; the whole nation rejoiced at the happy ending. Never before, it seemed, had the Generalissimo been so universally popular.

Two hours later another plane brought Chang Hsueh-liang and T. V. Soong to the same landing-ground. There was no reception.

XII

INSIDE SIAN

THE Sian Guest-house is a large, ugly building set in a desert of concrete: but in the Western capital it is the last word in modern luxury. An impressive fleet of cars stood outside the doors, for at this time many Tungpei commanders lived in the hotel, undeterred by the fate of the last group of officers who had occupied it. It was the chic modern rendezvous of Sian.

I arrived like the first swallow, a happy omen of returning prosperity. Obviously the Shanghai office-clerk was getting tired of North-eastern uniforms. He greeted me rapturously, if somewhat incredulously.

“Sir, you came by aeroplane?”

“No,” I said firmly. “By rickshaw, donkey, and military truck.” Clearly he did not believe me. But he gave me a room, and apologised that he had no foreign newspapers later than December 10th.

An air of conspiracy hung over the hotel. There were always conferences going on in back rooms, and officers came and went with an expression of urgency and determination which one does not usually associate with uniforms in China. Even the chauffeurs who sat back comfortably in the easy chairs of the entrance lounge were mysteriously alert. Anyone entering the lounge came under the scrutiny of bodyguards, plain-clothes men, and private spies who

were there to watch the plain-clothes men. It was very stimulating.

On the first morning I had arranged to go with Miao, Ying, and Sun—the “Three Musketeers of Sian”—to visit Lintung, the scene of Chiang Kai-shek’s capture. Miao arrived in a “Sun Yat-sen” official’s uniform, looking very pleased with himself; it seemed that he had found plenty of work to do. He and Ying were rather desperately optimistic, I felt, about the situation.

No other foreigners had arrived in Sian since the coup, I learned. This disposed of Don, whom I had confidently expected to find waiting for me. Since Chiang Kai-shek’s release, a number of foreigners had left the city, but no one else had come in. Most people thought then that communications would shortly be restored; as it proved, they were sadly disappointed.

Then Ying remarked casually, “You know there is one other foreign journalist here—an American woman, Miss Smedley?”

“What—Agnes Smedley?”

He nodded. “Sure. She lives in this hotel.”

Here was a strange piece of news. Agnes Smedley is one of the best-known foreign names in China. It had been almost a legend among the Chinese students I had known in Peking. For the author of *Chinese Destinies* and *China’s Red Army Marches* has probably more enthusiastic readers among the youth of China than any other foreign writer except Gorki.

Certainly the most picturesque and outspoken of the few foreigners who have openly allied themselves with the cause of the Chinese Revolution since 1927,

Agnes Smedley had become a kind of stormy petrel of the revolutionary movement. Her reputation among foreigners in China—few of whom have ever seen her—bore witness to an aggressive and dynamic personality. In the treaty ports she was regarded as Borodin's legitimate successor; it was known that she had worked with Madame Sun Yat-sen, and this was generally considered a mask for much more dangerous connections. With her private life the unsubtle Shanghai mind made heavy pleasantries; a woman who was known to have had an Indian husband was fair game in China. To take the struggle of oppressed peoples seriously is bad enough; but to take their side against the oppressor is unpardonable.

When I had been in Shanghai in November, while the great strike in the cotton-mills of the Yangtze-poo brought thousands of men and women workers on to the streets, the Japanese papers had loudly announced that the "American agent Smedley" was behind the strike. I knew that this was nonsense, for I had tried to meet Agnes Smedley at this time, and found that she was not in Shanghai. She had been in Sian, at the hot springs of Huachingshih, getting over a breakdown, and working at another book on the Red Army. But to most people—I suddenly realised—her presence there would be given another interpretation. It was, as I soon discovered.

I knew her only from her books on China; and from that most amazing autobiography ever written by a woman, *Daughter of Earth*. From the wide background of the American continent—the brutal poverty of mining towns, the *mesa* and mountains of the South-west, the changing scene of Main Street and the big cities—she had gone to Europe, and spent

several years in Germany teaching at the University of Berlin. Attracted first by the Indian Nationalist movement, her association with which cost her weeks of detention in an American gaol, she had already a special feeling for the East. Both by birth and class-consciousness, with every instinct toughened in her years of struggle for independence and education, she was a revolutionary. It was inevitable that she should come to China, where the greatest revolutionary movement in the world outside of Russia had just been so savagely suppressed.

She came to Shanghai finally as correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (in its older and more liberal days): and in China she found at last work that absorbed all her energies, and meant a great deal more to the world than the dark intricacies of Indian nationalism. Her books on China — chaotic, impressionistic, passionately and triumphantly one-sided — were really the first to interpret to a wide international public something of the real struggle of social forces going on in China. She had one collective hero—the Chinese Red Army; and she had superb material. Whatever the critics might say, she had made Chu Teh and Ho Lung and Mao Tse-tung, her beloved Red Army commanders, real and living beings to the workers of Düsseldorf and Detroit.

I wondered what sort of reception I should get as I scribbled on a card, "I know some friends of yours in Shanghai," and sent it in by a room-boy. I waited in the hotel lounge, conscious of scrutiny from several quarters.

A woman of something over forty came striding down the corridor, my card in her hand. She was short, strongly built, with a brown weather-beaten

face and short hair; and with extraordinarily wide-set, candid eyes.

"Mr. Bertram?" The voice was harsh, and sounded hostile. She wore a red woollen jersey, brown skirt, and heavy brogues.

"Yes," I said. "You won't know me; but I've met some people you know in Shanghai." I gave the names.

"Indeed," said Agnes. "And what are you doing here?"

It was the question I had wanted to ask her. But I explained that I had come out of a simple curiosity to find out what was happening in Sian, and to do some writing about it. I had a connection, I added, with some English newspapers.

"What papers?" Agnes was relentless. I mentioned the *Daily Herald* and—in a weak moment—*The Times*.

"The London *Times* is no friend of China." Her mouth shut like a trap. "How did you get here? For all I know, you may be a British spy."

This was unpromising. "I came in with a Tungpei man," I said. "Would you like to meet him? We're going out to Lintung with Sun Ming-chiu."

This name, which had been unknown three weeks ago, made a more favourable impression. Agnes Smedley was not unwilling, it seemed, to meet the man who had captured Chiang Kai-shek. But she was still a little suspicious about me. "Do you know anyone else in Sian?" she asked.

I drew a bow at a venture, and mentioned the young editor of Chang Hsueh-liang's Sian daily. Fortunately she had met him.

"Yes, I know him. Is he a friend of yours?"

"We used to live in the same rooms in Peking. He'll tell you I'm not a spy."

"Good," said Agnes decisively. "I'll ask him."

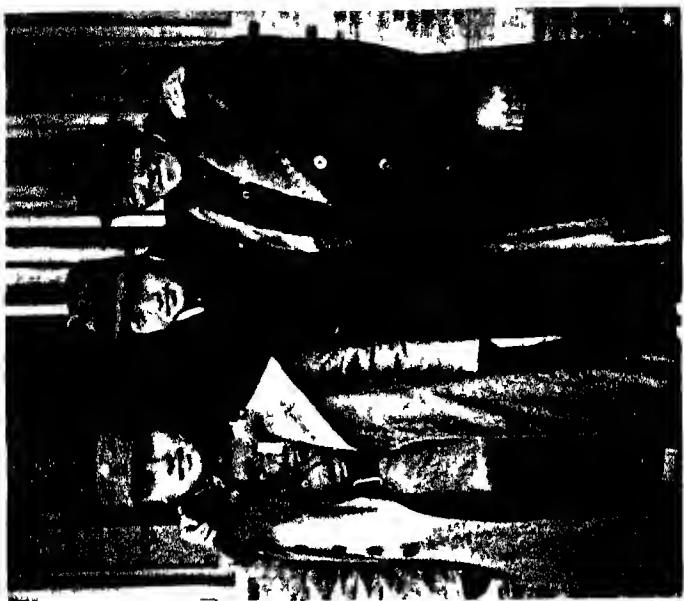
This was the beginning of an acquaintance that developed rapidly, after I had disestablished myself from any sinister connection with world imperialism. But I soon found that Agnes Smedley had a local reputation. To the foreigners in Sian (mostly missionaries) it was demonstrably clear that she had come to the North-west a month before to start a revolution. That she had lived quietly at Lintung, recovering from an illness and working on her book, meant nothing to them. When the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek disturbed that idyllic seclusion, she had come into the city and taken a room at the Guest-house. Here on the morning of December 12th Yang Hu-cheng's troops had broken into her room, and—like the other guests in the hotel—she had lost her money and valuables. Even this incident was somehow explained away as a masterpiece of deception. For the missionaries believed that the Communists were at the back of everything; and it was inconceivable that Agnes Smedley should be ignorant of anything that the Communists were planning. As they had very little idea of what was really happening in Sian, this gave them something to talk about; and they had not wasted their opportunities.

Agnes liked Sun Ming-chiu from the start, for he represented "direct action." We set out in a couple of cars for Lintung. It was a clear sunny day; Sian turned out to be much warmer than Peking in December. And there was a slightly festal air about everything in those days after Chiang's release. It seemed that the danger of war, which for a moment had loomed so near, had become much more remote.

Outside the walls of Lintung, airmen were busy working on a small plane that stood out in the middle of the fields not far from Huachingkung. Large painted characters proclaimed it a birthday present from the municipality of Peking to the Generalissimo. It had made a spectacular three-point landing on the morning of the "Double Twelfth," apparently with the notion of carrying off Chiang Kai-shek in a last-minute rescue; and had been promptly captured by the Tungpei men. Now it was being returned with the other Nanking planes.

We explored Huachingkung thoroughly, with Sun showing us the scene of action on that memorable morning. We climbed the snow-covered slope up which Chiang had made his first escape, only to be caught again in the barren shelter of the Tiger Rock. (On this spot the Chinese, with their incurable fondness for memorials, have already begun to build a pavilion; and have carved on the rock face an inscription which proclaims—not, perhaps, without insight—"From here our national salvation begins anew.") Miao was in the highest spirits; he insisted on having his picture taken with his two friends outside what had been Chiang Kai-shek's bedroom. He was getting the fullest possible thrill out of the memory of that day.

Then he went off to take a bath in the famous hot springs where the broadest of Chinese beauties, Yang Kuei Fei, had worn a hollow in her favourite marble slab. I remained talking French with a young cousin of Chang Hsueh-liang's who had studied aeronautics at Versailles. He wore his cap jauntily across one eye, and was reassuringly cheerful about the outlook for the North-west. "But Fu Tze Ling" ("The Wise



"THE THREE MUSKETERS OF SIAN"
Sun Ying and Mao outside Chang Kai-shak's
bedroom at Lintung



AGNES SYNDERLY IN THE UNIFORM OF
THE RFD ARMY

Commander") "should never have gone to Nanking. That was unnecessary; and very dangerous for him."

Miao came back from his bath, radiant; he was very fond of Lintung. "I once spent a month here," he told me, "in exile. Marshal Chang said he didn't want to see me again because I looked like a Japanese. So I took a month's holiday at the hot springs." He seemed to have spent most of his time in Sian either in high favour or in banishment: he showed me a tower on the walls of Sian where he had once been imprisoned for several weeks. I could understand that some of his wilder schemes might have come amiss, if put forward at the wrong moment. But his passionate anti-Japanism, it seemed, could always redeem him in the eyes of the Young Marshal.

They were very young, these three North-easterners who had planned the arrest of a "dictator." And they had very much enjoyed it all. "You know," Ying whispered to me, as though it were almost high treason to mention it, "the only time Chiang ever smiled, in those first three days, was when they brought him back his false teeth!" Miao and Ying were pure intellectuals; Sun was a soldier who only two years before had been a raw young officer with Chang Hsueh-liang at Hankow. But they all had a quality of enthusiasm and selflessness that had obviously had its effect on their young commander, and I could understand their power to influence him. What they could not face, as the next few weeks were to show, was the depressing interlude of endless negotiations, the whole elaborate business of Chinese bargaining, that followed the release of Chiang Kai-shek. And this was perhaps a pity.

We drove back to Sian in a mood of some elation. Whatever the next move might be, they were ready to meet it. I remembered Borodin's bitter remark, as he made his way wearily back to Russia after the collapse of the Wuhan Government—"They're all good when they're young!" He had seen enough in his time of the fatal effects of militarism and the old Chinese system of official bureaucracy on many eager young commanders. It is the youth of China that has made her revolution, and the youth of China that has always been sacrificed. But even the youth of a nation can learn the lessons of history; and Japanese imperialism, since 1931, has made realists as well as revolutionaries.

There was news enough in Sian, even after the release of the Generalissimo; and I was anxious to get some messages out. But the censorship at this time—a double censorship, both by the North-western authorities and by Nanking—was capricious and uncertain. Before long the problem was to be settled quite simply. The censorship came down like a solid curtain around us.

Official statements, I knew, would carry more weight at this stage than personal impressions. Since my first arrival in Sian I had been trying to get an interview with Yang Hu-cheng, the Shensi general who was virtual Commander-in-Chief, since the Young Marshal's departure, in the North-west. Agnes knew one of his secretaries, a sleepy-looking young man who had been trained in Germany and whose placid exterior concealed a tireless and dynamic energy. Through him we managed to make an appointment with the local war-lord.

Yang Hu-cheng's headquarters were in what is called the Hsin Cheng, or "New City"—a large walled fortress within the walls of Sian. The name is inappropriate, for the place is unchanged from the old site of the T'ang palace, which was once a Forbidden City of emperors. There is nothing very new about these towering sun-baked walls except the modern machine-gun emplacements built into them at intervals. But none of the original T'ang buildings remain; we waited for the "rebel" commander in a comfortable room, furnished in Chinese style, but with easy chairs that were really comfortable.

"Bandit Yang," as he was still commonly called, had rather a mixed reputation. His antecedents were common knowledge: he had begun, like many another Chinese general, like "Old Marshal" Chang Tso-lin in Manchuria, as a local chieftain, whose energy and ferocity had extended his power over an increasing army of mercenaries until they finally gained official recognition. The merry-go-round of old-style Chinese politics always brought opportunities for rising young militarists. When the Northern coalition of generals resisted the advance of the Nationalist armies from the South in 1926, Yang had been in control of the city of Sian. He declared for the National Revolution and held Sian for eight months against a besieging army under Liu Chen-hua, until finally relieved by Feng Yu-hsiang. It is a fair indication of Yang's temper (not unlike that of some British commanders in the Great War) that, while he held the city, thirty-five thousand of its inhabitants died of starvation.

His exploits at holding out under siege had won him the honorary name of Yang *Hu-cheng*, "Tiger of Cities." But everywhere throughout Shensi, where

his fame was considerable, he was known by the less dignified nickname of Yang Chiu-wa, or "Ninth-baby Yang." (Many Shensi peasants, as we discovered, knew him by this name and by no other.) Dignified by Nanking with the official title of "Pacification Commissioner" of Shensi, he had returned from a visit to Japan to take up effective control of his native province. One of his first tasks was to thin the ranks of banditry, which had thriven since his time in the poverty-stricken North-west. Yang's approach to the problem was simple: he knew the biggest bandits in the province personally, so he invited five of them to a banquet in his yamen and shot them in the courtyard before dinner.

This was the man who had thrown in his lot with Chang Hsueh-liang in the movement of the "Double Twelfth"; and if he had had his way, it is doubtful if Chiang Kai-shek would ever have seen Nanking again. The co-operation of Yang and the Young Marshal was a surprise to many people; it was known that the "Shensi Tiger" had not welcomed the arrival of the North-eastern army in his preserves. But when he realised that the "Bandit-Suppressor" had no wish to encroach on his own power in the province, Yang had shown a pronounced sympathy with the anti-civil-war, anti-Japanese policy that Chang advocated. The Shensi general was said to be resolutely anti-Japanese and strongly critical of Nanking's "policy of surrender." Perhaps he was tired of a quiet life; he had wanted to join in the Kwangsi-Kwangtung movement that autumn, but had been persuaded to wait by the Young Marshal. Now he was Vice-President of the New Military Affairs Council in the rebel provinces, and acting commander of the United Anti-Japanese

Armies. We were very curious to see this Hotspur of the North.

The German-speaking secretary came back into the room, and with him a large, heavily-built man in a simple blue working uniform, without any insignia of any kind. "Tiger" Yang did not stand on ceremony; he waved us back into chairs, and waited, with a rather wooden face, for questions. When we put these, in German, through the secretary, he answered in a strangely soft, almost gentle voice, contrasting noticeably with his wrestler's build and lurid reputation. I had the impression that he spoke so softly because otherwise he might want to shout. We asked first about the meaning and purpose of the movement that had begun so dramatically with the arrest of the Generalissimo. Yang replied in phrases that were already familiar from the pages of the local newspapers. "We forcefully requested General Chiang Kai-shek to respect and accept the opinion of the people on the vital issues of civil war and resistance to Japan. We were obliged to use this forceful method of persuasion in order to prevent further civil war, and to unite the whole strength of the country against the major enemy, which is Japanese imperialism. Our movement in the North-west is inseparable from the whole international peace front."

"What is the difference," I asked, "between this movement in the North and the recent so-called 'anti-Japanese movement' in the South-west, led by Li Tsung-jen and Pai Chung-hsi?"

"We cannot speak with authority for the South-west. With any genuine anti-Japanese feeling, of course, we have the fullest sympathy. But the pro-

gramme in the South-west was not clear—it was not shown how the aims of the movement might be realised. Our programme is complete: it is summed up in the 'Eight Basic Principles' of Marshal Chang's manifesto. And a part of this programme has already been realised."

We began to put forward some of the amazingly contradictory reasons for the revolt in Sian that had been suggested in the foreign Press. The most damning of these was the Moscow story—that the whole thing was a Japanese plot, with Wang Ching-wei as its chief agent. In reply to this, Yang was (I suspect) unprintable; the most harmless of his comments, when translated, was "We can never have any respect for such a man as Wang Ching-wei." To the Tokio story, that it had all been the work of Moscow and the Third International, he gave a more serious answer. "No, this is untrue: to suggest that the Soviet Union or Comintern is behind our movement is to undervalue our own struggle for national independence. But we do feel that Soviet Russia, with the other democratic countries, should sympathise with our own democratic movement for national liberation."

"How is this movement democratic?" we asked.

"First of all, because it expresses the will of the mass of the Chinese people who have suffered, in Manchuria and North China, from Japanese imperialism. But many of our demands are fundamental democratic demands, guaranteeing civil rights to the people. Here in Sian we have released political prisoners, we have proclaimed freedom of assembly and freedom of patriotic organisation. We believe that full political freedom is necessary for China in order for us to unite in the defence of our country."

I felt we were beginning to get out of the routine phrases of polite interview, for "democracy" is still a challenging word in China. We pressed the point: "You use the slogan of the 'United Front.' Just what is meant by this?"

"Resistance to Japanese aggression has become an idea that unites the whole Chinese people," the Shensi war-lord stated vigorously. "We are of the opinion that, in face of such a national crisis, all party interests must recede into the background, and all must be united under the Anti-Japanese flag. A National Front against Japanese imperialism is not just a slogan. It is something that can be achieved in China here and now."

"But is China really strong enough to fight Japan?"

This was a crucial question; it is perhaps the biggest single question that can be asked in China today. Chiang Kai-shek's great argument in the past years had always been that China was too weak to offer military resistance, that China must wait till she had a bigger air force, a better equipped national army. This argument had in all times of crisis determined the foreign policy of the Central Government; it had been repeated so often that nine people out of ten really believed it.

In answer to this same question, Mao tse-tung, Chairman of the Chinese Soviet, had returned a no less emphatic affirmative in an interview with an adventurous American journalist who had visited him inside the Red region that summer. Mao had argued that the only kind of war China could ever fight was one of prolonged guerilla resistance along the widest possible front, and that for this kind of warfare she was as well prepared now as she was ever likely to be.

Certainly the record of the Chinese Red Armies in holding out against overwhelmingly superior forces seemed to indicate the possibilities of such tactics: if the Manchurian Volunteers could keep a Japanese garrison so busy, what could all China do in armed revolt?

I wondered what Yang, who had a record as a real fighting general, would say. And his answer was all the more surprising, because he used a psychological and not a strategic argument.

"How can anyone answer this question in theory, in the abstract? China's strength is not in new aeroplanes or tanks—Japan can always have as many of these as China, and more. But our real strength is our knowledge that we *must* fight Japan. It is not a question of material strength, but of will faced by necessity. When we have the will to fight, we can."

"That's a real answer!" said Agnes enthusiastically, when it was translated. And I was inclined to agree: there was no doubt that the past policy of the Central Government had succeeded in leaking away most of the will to active resistance that had existed in China. We felt a new respect for "Bandit" Yang; he looked as though he meant what he said, and he was a last-ditcher himself.

We asked about the release of the Generalissimo from Sian, and got the answer we expected. "General Chiang for very long had known little of the demands and sentiments of the Chinese people in regard to Japanese imperialism, because he always associated with 'pro-Japanese' elements. We used the opportunity we had in Sian to discuss this question systematically, and we finally convinced him to the point of accepting our main principles for a change of policy. Then we were free to release him." This was an obvious

simplification, though it was far from meaningless.

We asked if the troops in the North-west had not opposed the release of Chiang Kai-shek. This Yang denied, but (I thought) rather superficially. He seemed to think the position at that time very favourable. "We believe in the Generalissimo's integrity. When he has reformed the Government at Nanking, and separated from the 'pro-Japanese' elements, he will be our real leader against Japan."

This had a note of finality, and we rose to go. "But remember," Yang added with sudden warmth, "this Sian 'incident' was not something sudden, not just the action of two generals. It was a move demanded by all the troops in the North-west, and by the mass of the people.

"We have no place in our movement for personal hatred. We want only war against Japan, and an end to civil wars. We say nothing against General Chiang Kai-shek: we want above all to fight side by side with him against the enemy. Our demands are simple: 'Peace within; without, war to the death against the national aggressor!'"

"Well, what do you think of Yang Hu-cheng?" I asked Agnes as we came away. She was frowning with concentration rather than displeasure.

"I don't like his voice. But he may be all right—he was once a poor peasant himself." She always made concessions to a proletarian background. "All the same, I don't think I'd trust that man too far."

The interview itself was fine, if anyone could be found to believe it. I sent off a telegram; and it was the last message I got out from Sian along the wires. Shortly afterwards the blockade began in earnest.

XIII

PROPAGANDA

I FOUND my friend the editor in an office that shook with the furious thumping of underground presses. He was surrounded by a group of young assistants who had laid aside their blue students' gowns and were getting to work in shirt-sleeves. Never before had I seen such activity in a Chinese office, which is usually a peaceful place where long-gowned clerks sip tea and paint characters with an ink-brush in a leisurely and well-bred manner.

Chang greeted me with a slow grin across his broad, honest, typically North-eastern face. "Ah, Lao Po! So now you are among the rebels. Aren't you afraid for your life?"

"I'll take a chance on that," I responded. "How are you?"

A few months before, I had known him as a student in Peking with a promising reputation as a journalist. He had been prominent in the Student movement, and once, in a demonstration, had only escaped arrest when a group of girl students (who liked him very much) had seized him by the legs and dragged him away from the police. He was a Tungpei man, formerly from Mukden; and on his leaving University, Chang Hsueh-liang had made him editor of the new Sian daily that had been created as an organ of the anti-Japanese movement in the North-west.

Meeting him again in Sian, I was struck once more by the sudden maturity that the Chinese often show when they exchange the rather sentimental atmosphere of "college life" for a responsible position. Chang had always been a responsible person; but almost overnight he had become an extremely competent editor, and a very serious man of affairs.

"As you see, we are very busy," he informed me. "This office works overtime; I get out my paper, and now I work on the Publicity Committee. They tell so many lies about us in Sian, and there is no real way to answer them. Have you seen any of these?"

He handed me a bundle of clippings from an English paper in Shanghai. In the first report it was modestly stated that Chang Hsueh-liang had released the Generalissimo for the sum of eighty million dollars. Half of this had been brought to Sian by Mr. T. V. Soong, the Governor of the Bank of China; and the rest was to be deposited abroad, whither the Young Marshal would travel shortly. It was a good story, even for the Japanese.

"And have you heard," Chang continued ruefully, "of the way the Tungpei soldiers nailed the Police Commissioner to the city gates? Mr. Ma must be almost back in Nanking by now." He sighed, and then said more cheerfully, "But I hope you will send out some true stories about Sian?"

"I'm doing the best I can. But there's always the censorship—they cut out a third of my interview with Yang Hu-cheng. And the mails are so uncertain."

"The radio is the best," Chang said thoughtfully. "They can't censor that, you know. We have a regular news broadcast in English."

"They'll probably jam it," I said. "But it's one

way to get news straight. Who does the broadcasting?"

"We tried first with a Chinese speaking English; but it was very difficult to understand. And then Miss Smedley offered to help us. She does it now every night."

"Does it get through?"

Chang shrugged his shoulders. "There are difficulties—sabotage, for one. But sometimes it is heard in Shanghai." He looked a question. "If you want to reach the foreign newspapers, that is the way to do it. You see, I am in charge of the radio programme."

"I'll talk to Agnes Smedley about it," I said. "Meantime, I wish you'd let me see some of those English papers."

Chang gave me a bundle of them; he got his pick from the local censorship, which confiscated all the mail that came in. By this arrangement Agnes and I became the only foreigners in Sian with the doubtful luxury of an English newspaper. It was often more than a week old, but that did not matter—we soon got used to it. And some of the stories we read about what was happening in Sian made us rub our eyes. It was an initiation into imaginative journalism at its most racy.

Returning to the hotel that morning, I met Agnes Smedley setting out into the streets with a first-aid kit under one arm. "Do you want to come and see the released political prisoners?" she hailed me. "I'm going round to see the women now."

"Surely," I said, and fell into step beside her. This was strenuous enough, for Agnes marched like the Red

Army. She had collected an interpreter—one of the young Peking students who had come to Sian to do national salvation work under Sun Ming-chiu. He was a comical-looking youth, for he had cropped his head in an access of patriotic zeal, and the style did not become him. Moreover, in his desire to "sacrifice himself," he wore nothing but a thin cotton uniform in midwinter (because, he said, the heroic anti-Japanese fighters had only one blanket each, and he was not going to be more comfortable than they were.) As a result, he usually had a cold, which he secretly rather enjoyed, as a sign of martyrdom.

There is plenty of absurdity about "student patriotism." But it remains true that for the majority of Chinese students, who are desperately poor, an academic career means the only chance of a job and a livelihood. They are prepared to risk this—and it is the only security they have—for what is, in the simplest phrase, love of their country. I do not know what has happened to our little friend Liu by now; probably he has joined the Red Army, where they will teach him to take better care of his health.

The streets through which we passed were crowded with soldiers and carriers as well as the usual throng of townspeople. Occasionally we met the brightly coloured silk dresses and blank, heavily powdered faces of sing-song girls, out for a morning stroll. Sian had been a garrison town for so long that the trade had prospered; Liu, who had been well brought-up at a missionary school, shied like a skittish pony whenever he encountered a bold glance from one of these painted ladies, and got on the other side of us for protection.

We found the women prisoners in a large building

that had been something official and Kuomintang. Over forty of them had been Red Army women, captured in the fighting between the Government forces and the Reds about a year before. They were solidly built peasants from Hunan and Szechuan and north Shensi, looking a little like Eskimos in their padded winter clothes, with their black hair falling into their eyes. In an upper room they sat about on the floor, sewing quilted bedding for the soldiers.

They greeted Agnes cheerfully, for they knew her well, and had great faith in her medicines. Most of them needed attention, and their condition gave me a sudden insight into Chinese prison life. For an hour or so we washed and dressed infections, and applied iodine liberally, for the bright yellow stain gave general satisfaction. But we were helpless enough when confronted with a hand or a foot frozen hard on the long march through the snows of Sikang, where many of these women had come with Mao Tse-tung. Two or three cases were so serious that we could only recommend a doctor. "I'll see that they get one," said Agnes; and I knew that she would.

"What happened to the other political prisoners?" I asked.

"Three hundred men were released; many of them have been drafted into the different armies. But there were some children; I haven't seen them yet." She turned to our student companion, who had observed this process of bathing dirty feet with some distaste, and was obviously eager to be off. "What happened to the Red Army children?"

Liu immediately became enthusiastic. "They are at the headquarters of the Anti-Japanese Vanguard. We

can go and see them now." He led the way with alacrity.

The Red Army children, or *hsiao hung kweitzé* ("little red devils"), are famous in China. They are the messengers of these peasant armies, entrusted with the gathering of information, and often with secret missives of considerable importance. For a child can get through where a man or a woman might be suspect.

Drilling in a sunless courtyard we found a group of some forty youngsters, still in their black prison uniforms, with black peaked caps. All of them had been released from the prisons of Sian after the "Double Twelfth," where they had been held as "dangerous and subversive elements." They were all ages between ten and sixteen.

"You see what Nanking makes war on!" said our guide, the student commander of the youthful company. With a smile he presented us to the "shock-brigader" of this Children's Vanguard. This was a solemn-faced youngster of eleven, who thrust out his chest valiantly and tried to look like a hero. "He worked in the Intelligence Service, and brought over two Government regiments to the Reds." It sounded fantastic, but was by no means impossible.

Most of the group were from Szechuan, and had been attached to the 4th Red Army Corps under the command of Hsu Hsiang-chien. Some of them had no families; many were the sons of landless labourers or poor peasants who had followed the Red Army from their native villages. Two or three came from Kiangsi and Hunan, and had made the long march across seven provinces to the North-west. Although they were so young, they carried themselves and spoke like men: there was a steady look about their

eyes that told its own tale of a childhood that had looked clear-eyed on suffering. They were an amazing little group, and of course, they won Agnes Smedley's heart. The exploits of these "little devils" were meat and drink to her.

"Where do you come from?" she asked one boy, whose cool eyes stared straight back under his peaked cap.

"From Szechuan."

"What did your father and mother do?"

"They are labourers. They are still in Szechuan. I have no brothers or sisters."

"Can you read and write?"

"Of course. I learnt in the Red Army."

"What did you do in the Red Army?"

"I worked in the Intelligence Service."

"Why did you leave your home, and join the Reds?"

"To fight for our national liberation."

He had learnt his lesson; the last answer was much more than a phrase. At an age when most children are still running the streets, or (in China) riding the water-buffalo, these youngsters had shouldered the responsibilities of men.

They were organised now into a Children's Anti-Japanese Vanguard; and besides their regular school-work, they spent many hours practising patriotic songs, and preparing to do propaganda work among the primary schools of Sian. These were some of the "bandits" one had read so much about in the Kuomintang press; in actual fighting, they were more dreaded than the regular Red Army men, for they were utterly reckless of life, and many Government troops who went over to the Reds confessed that their greatest fear had been of the "little devils" who knew



A "VETFRAN" OF THE RFD
INTELLIGENCE CORPS
This ten-year-old won over two
Government regiments



RED ARMY CHILDREN
After their release these "little red devils" were organised into a
Children's Anti-Japanese Vanguard

none of the rules of polite fighting, and always shot to kill.

They looked harmless enough now; and sang some of their songs for us, serious and unsmiling. I remembered, from an evening in Peking, the marching-song of the Red Army. We saw them often again in Sian.

Agnes had been horrified by their clothes and their unheated quarters, and characteristically demanded that they should have new uniforms and blankets. When we were told that there was no money to get them blankets, "What do you have all these committees for?" she demanded ferociously. "These children need to be taken care of. I shall apply for a special grant from the Military Council."

The Children's Vanguard got their blankets. But was there any other country in the world, I wondered as we came away, any other revolutionary movement, where children would do such work as this; would be shot or imprisoned for life as a menace to society? I began to understand Agnes Smedley's enthusiasm for the Red Army of China.

I had been long enough in Sian, and had seen enough of the activities of the "rebels," to realise how false was the picture that was being painted in the outside Press. The city was quiet and orderly; all the organisation that went on was along the familiar lines of "National Salvation." As far as I could see, there was no danger to anybody, unless the Government, to save its face, should insist on making war.

"We must do something about this news business," I said to Agnes that night. "What sort of stuff do you broadcast?"

"The truth, which is more than Nanking does," she answered grimly. "But I don't want any foreigners to recognise my voice, or they'll say the Reds are running Sian. They've said it often enough already."

"Well, you've got a reputation. I haven't. The most important thing any of us can do is to get the news out from here straight, and telegraph and mails are useless. I'd be glad to broadcast news items, or describe anything I've seen myself."

"Fine," said Agnes. "Come along to the station with me to-night and we'll try it out."

This was the beginning of a broadcasting combination that later gained a certain notoriety in China. Through it I learnt a lot.

The Sian radio station was a compact little place, picturesquely situated behind an old palace in the heart of the city. It was always heavily guarded, for it was practically the only link with the outside world that remained. A military pass took us through the main gateway, past sandbags and machine-guns trained on the square outside. Inside the courts there were always sentries on the prowl; and until they had learnt to recognise a visitor, their abrupt challenge from the darkness was apt to be disconcerting.

We usually arrived late, for it was impossible to be punctual in Sian after nine o'clock, when martial law obtained in the streets. Underneath the towering steel mast was a modern little studio, very gay inside with blue cushions and Chinese carpets. We would slip through the heavily curtained doors with an eye on the clock, and a long-gowned servant would bring tea in an awed silence. Then Agnes would get to work with her elbows planted firmly in front of

the microphone, while I usually sorted out incompletely notes.

In the machine-room next door, two immense Tungpei soldiers invariably sat like iron guards. They had bayonets fixed on their rifles, and held the apprehensive technicians in a cold, unwavering stare. There is a kind of atmosphere about any broadcasting station, but Sian added the thrills of revolution and counter-revolution. I realised suddenly the vital importance of radio in any political movement. So long as Station XGOB continued to function, Nanking could not close down entirely on news from Sian.

We divided the news of the day between us, and sometimes gave short descriptions of various activities going on in Sian and in the countryside around. We tried very hard to be objective; and always satisfied ourselves that the facts we announced were accurate. But Agnes had a fine slashing style that was not very well suited to diplomatic statement, and an incurable fondness for the word "masses." In fact, the way she pronounced this word, with a broad "a" and a vigorous enunciation of the sibilants, would—I felt sure—identify her voice to anyone who had ever spoken to her for two minutes. By contrast, I tried to make my voice sound as unemotional as possible, modelling my delivery on the soothing accents of the B.B.C. In Sian, we thought we were doing pretty well.

But Station XGOB was fronting a hostile world. My friend Chang, who was chief radio organiser, had ambitious ideas, and arranged for news broadcasts in French, German, Russian, and Japanese, as well as the regular evening news in English. The Sian

Broadcasting Company had become a real international; and unfortunately, it was treated as one. Nanking or Hankow or some more powerful station cut in on the same wavelength with a siren that made the night hideous; and very few of the famous Sian broadcasts could be heard clearly, even in Sian. Radio students of the Tungpei University discussed the problem endlessly; and before long it was discovered that the manager of the station (apparently a good Kuomintang member) had been secretly interfering with the strength of the transmission. He was taken off and put under lock and key before the enraged guards—who understood nothing of the mechanism they had been set to watch over—could get at him; and a fresh start was made. But what with wrecking from within, and Nanking's counterblast from without, it is not surprising that most of the Sian news failed to get across.

We would come back from the radio station each night, and make coffee in Agnes's room. All kinds of people drifted in during these evenings—journalists, students, officials, soldiers—and we would talk over the general situation, or speculate on the probable plans of the Japanese. Agnes, who had renounced most things American, retained an American taste for good coffee: and she made it over a spirit-lamp with a skill which excited my envy.

One night a tall, slim young man in a plain khaki uniform came in with a friend. I noticed at once his beautiful carriage, and the healthy glow of his brown cheeks. He was a Red Army commander, and had been for nine years with P'eng Teh-huai, fighting in Hunan and Kiangsi; and then on the long trek to

the North. P'eng Teh-huai was Agnes Smedley's favourite Red leader, and she knew every campaign he had fought. They settled down to discuss details of strategy five years old: the newcomer flushed with pleasure when he found that this foreigner knew the names of obscure villages in the South, once given a brief fame as the scene of fierce engagements. Their conversation sketched the ten years' history of the Chinese Red Army. It was as vivid as a novel by Stendhal.

"Yes, that was in Hunan, where the miners joined us—they fought with picks and iron bars; we captured three thousand rifles. . . ." "In the mountains it was cold; we had to sleep standing against tree-trunks, there was no level ground. . . ." "The partisans held off a whole army corps for two months while we made that retreat. . . ." "Crossing the rivers was hard. . . . There were the printing presses to get across, and the Whites attacked all day. . . ." "We disarmed five thousand men, after that engagement. But we gave them back their rifles, and told them, 'Chinese don't fight against Chinese.' . . ." "No; that comrade was not shot. They carried him through the streets all day in a wooden cage: he died by torture. . . ."

Agnes lived every battle through in the telling; though she would never admit it, it was the romance of the thing that caught her then—the desperate odds of rifles and hand-grenades against bombs and heavy artillery; the struggle for survival of the little Kiangsi republic, islanded among its mountains, without salt, without a thousand things that the ingenuity of Berlin-trained engineers and scientists could only improvise from the roughest of materials. A part of the story she

had told; but there was so much more—the last great campaign in Kiangsi, the Long March, the reunion of the four main Red Armies in the North-west after so many years. It is the most dramatic story, perhaps, of modern times; and one of the least known.

I learned to know Agnes Smedley as a real person, in these long evenings of coffee-fumes and tobacco-smoke. I had imagined someone tremendously dynamic and dehumanised: Agnes was dynamic enough, but with it she was one of the most human and lovable people I had ever met. All her judgements were instinctive or emotional: she was the world's best hater, but could be the most generous of friends. It was her misfortune to have the direct honesty that welcomes a fight in the open, but is peculiarly vulnerable to slander or attacks from the rear. And these, it seemed, she could never escape: for when a woman writes her life-story as Agnes Smedley had written it, all her cards are down.

The Chinese Revolution was in her blood. She lived for this; lived herself for years under the terror that lurks in the dark alleys of Shanghai, where gunmen are cheap and only the boatmen's poles stir the muddy waters of the Soochow Creek. She was a foreigner; she claimed every privilege of an American citizen, in a country where the foreigner makes his own laws, if he has cruisers in the Yangtse to back them up. And only this frank demand of a revolutionary for the same protection that is given to many dubious ventures on the fringes of imperialism saved her from a fate that many of her friends had not escaped.

"What does human life mean in this country?" she exclaimed to me once. "The Chinese revolution has

been the savagest, the most cruel, the world has known. How many millions dead—in this country you reckon the dead by millions, when millions can die in a flood or a famine. But still it goes on, and the leadership is always there, in spite of betrayals and torture and defeat. There is a cruelty here worse than anything they had to face in Russia, or Austria, or even Germany. I think it calls forth an even greater courage."

In all her years in China, Agnes had never been with the Red Army, which was for her the banner of the undefeated revolution. Now at last in Sian, with the curious situation thrown up by the events of that December, she had the chance of an open road into Red territory. And I could see that she was itching to take it.

At that time only one foreign writer, Edgar Snow, had reached the capital of Soviet China, and met and talked with the leaders of the Red Army whose names are legendary in the country districts of China—Ho Lung and P'eng Teh-huai and Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung. Snow had made the trip that summer, and returned with one of the few genuine "scoops" a journalist has ever made in China. I could see Agnes making a private resolution that she would be at least the first foreign woman to enter the Red region in the North-west.

She had waited long enough. And in the end she was not disappointed: though she was to find a Red Army at peace, and not at war.

XIV

HAPPY NEW YEAR

I WOKE on New Year's Day to the sound of singing in the streets. Through the iron gates of the hotel, the pale sunlight caught the coloured pennants carried by hundreds of marching school children. Brass bands throbbed in the distance, stirring memories of the Salvation Army. The whole city was on the streets, for a three days' holiday had been declared for New Year celebrations.

Chinese New Year does not come along until late February as a rule: when "Spring" begins, often with a lucky fall of snow. But Sian was having a break with tradition, and welcoming the new year by the Western calendar. That day was to begin, I remembered, with a review of troops and mass meeting at the air-field.

The lounge was filled with silk-gowned officials wearing the paper rosettes and scarlet ribbons of ceremony. We drove out to the air-port under immense red banners. The streets were lined with innumerable Nationalist flags. Everywhere was red, which is the traditional colour of rejoicing and celebration in China.

Agnes copied down the slogans from the banners that were all around us: "Welcome the United Front of National Liberation!" "Peace with our own countrymen! All guns against the foreign enemy!"

"Victory to the Chinese Republic in its 26th year!" The children waved as we passed; marching groups of young apprentices shouted "Down with Japanese Imperialism!" At the entrance to all public buildings were decorative *pailous* of festal red. The great Drum Tower, in the centre of the city, was covered with new posters showing workers, peasants, students, soldiers, and merchants marching together under the banner of the National Front.

The aerodrome was like a scene of carnival. Three rows of military planes were drawn up for inspection—they were all that remained of the Nanking air-fleet that had been captured after the "Double Twelfth." Curious citizens gathered before these beautiful and destructive machines, the latest products of Italian and American workshops. Before them soldiers stood on guard, joking and chatting freely with the onlookers. All barriers were down between the army and the people.

In front stretched the vast empty field, fading into a winter haze which almost concealed the dark lines of troops around its edge. Planes were flying in formation overhead. In the stands, beside the reviewing-box, the crowd was talkative and expectant. We found many friends, for everyone we knew in Sian was at the air-field.

The arrival of Yang Hu-cheng and his staff was greeted by an artillery salute. As the white smoke rolled across the field, the planes above dipped and came flying low across the centre stand. The review had begun.

The Chinese have a flair for displays and pageants, and the sceptical assert that most Chinese troops are better on review than anywhere else. The most

picturesque parade-ground in the world is probably the plain outside Peking, where the Emperor Ch'ien Lung used to review his armies, and built walls and watch-towers in the shelter of the hills to provide a martial background. Something of the same spirit of pageant entered into the New Year review of the North-western armies in Sian.

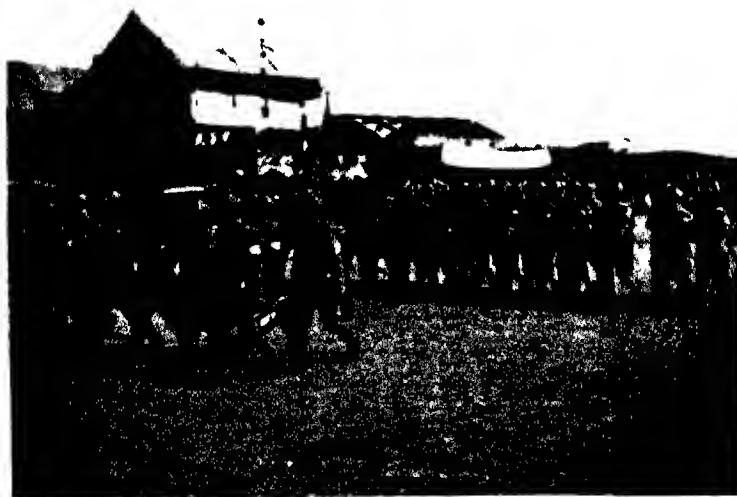
Before the march-past, Yang and his officers rode off to inspect the troops. The group of horsemen, with a red National standard carried in front of them, could be seen in the distance passing down the lines of men and guns. It was a full half-hour before the party returned to the tribune, and a bugle-band gave the signal for the march. Ten thousand troops, from every unit of the Tungpei and Hsipei armies, took part in this parade.

The North-easterners came first, marching with slung rifles and looking rather barbaric in their grey fur caps. They had modern European carbines, and five machine-guns to a company. Then came the troops of Yang Hu-cheng; the Shensi men were less well armed, but they marched magnificently. The most spectacular part of the review was the Tungpei cavalry, who passed the stand at a gallop, with their little Mongol ponies pulling furiously, manes and tails streaming in the wind. Squadrons of military trucks, with light anti-aircraft guns mounted and manned, closed the procession. It was a good rousing show; and it was well past noon before the bands fell in behind and played the last troops off.

"You see how strong a base we could have here," observed my friend the editor, who wore a red ribbon, and was doing some first-hand reporting for his paper. "We have the best cavalry in China; and



NANKING BOMBERS AND FIGHTERS ON SHOW AT THE SIAN
AERODROME ON NEW YEAR'S DAY



SHENSI TROOPS MARCH SMARTLY PAST THEIR COMMANDER,
GENERAL YANG HU-CHING

the best leadership—with the Red Army command. All the supplies that Chiang Kai-shek had sent up to the North-west for the anti-Red campaign have been captured; we even had Nanking's best aeroplanes, if we had only had pilots to fly them. With Ma Chan-shan in charge of the cavalry, and our three armies united, we could keep the Japanese very busy in Inner Mongolia."

This was the idea that obsessed many people in Sian at this time. The North-west could be made virtually impregnable: it was a natural base for operations against the Japanese in North China. With three hundred thousand regular troops (from the combined Tungpei, Hsipei, and Red Armies), and with an adequate base of supplies in Sian and Lanchow, the possibilities of action were considerable. Unfortunately, no one welcomed such action—least of all Nanking, when Shanghai and the coastline cities were so naked and vulnerable to Japanese reprisals. The most significant index of the gravity of the situation at this time was the sudden change in Japanese policy, from the old aggressiveness to a most unusual spirit of conciliation. With the first news from Sian, the campaign in Suiyuan came to a sudden halt: and Nanking was given every opportunity to quell the turbulent North-west without embarrassment. Japanese diplomacy had seen once again that most unexpected and unwelcome possibility—a formidable section of the Chinese forces united in active opposition to the encroachment into North China.

After the review came the mass meeting. This was announced by loud-speakers, and crowds of school

children and civilians gathered in the open around the tribune. The troops had piled arms at the other side of the field; they now broke ranks to assemble on the outskirts of the crowd. Chang had found us a place on the speakers' platform: from here we looked out over a vast sea of faces and tossing banners; beyond these were the grey uniforms and caps of the soldiers.

The meeting began with the usual ceremony before the portrait of Sun Yat-sen, which was mounted at the back of the tribune, with offerings of fruit and cakes set out before it. The Will was read, and the three bows of reverence swayed the vast crowd like a cornfield in the wind. Then Yang Hu-cheng, as the chief military leader of the North-west, made the speech of the day.

"Tiger" Yang was not an orator; he seemed to have got his speech off by heart. And he looked ill at ease in white gloves and full general's uniform, standing before the microphone; he was more at home on horseback. But he began with robust vigour:

"These celebrations are very different from any that have been held in the past! For in the past, every year our country was torn by civil wars. Now our Generalissimo has accepted the demands of the people, and we will have no more civil war. The patriotic movement will be liberated, and all parties in the country will be united to resist Japanese aggression and win back our lost territories."

It sounded very optimistic to us; but the crowd cheered Yang to the echo. A wiry little man at the loud-speaker, rather like an American "cheer-leader," began to scream slogans: "Long live the United Anti-Japanese Armies! Protect the North-west revolution-



YANG HU-CHENG'S PRIVATE HOUSE IN SIAN



NEW YEAR'S DAY CELEBRATIONS
Yang Hu-cheng addressing the mass meeting

ary base!" And the slogans rolled up from the crowd like a wave.

The most interesting feature of the meeting, to those of us who had seen reviews of troops in China, was the close fellow-feeling of soldiers and civilians. They mingled together in the audience, and shouted their slogans together, in a way I had never seen before. And Yang brought out this point when, at the end of his speech, he addressed the "military comrades." "You, soldiers of our united armies, must clearly understand the meaning of our military review today. Formerly reviews were made for emperors, or for the highest commanders alone. But today you passed in review, not just before your commanders, but before the whole people of the North-west, before your patriotic comrades in the national salvation movement. The masses of your own people wanted to see for themselves your anti-Japanese preparation and determination."

The phrases were familiar enough, but they had a ring of conviction. And there was no question about the response. For any anti-Japanese movement could be sure of mass support in China, and indeed—I felt—it would be impossible to have a mass-movement on any other basis.

The next speaker was a delegate from the All-China National Salvation Union. He was the only prominent member of the committee who had escaped arrest in November, and was an accomplished orator. Before he had got properly started, someone tripped over the cord to the loud-speakers, and the unpleasing whine of the amplification became suddenly an agonised shriek. (This, as we found before long, was a frequent happening at mass

meetings.) But the delegate finished his speech in good soap-box style; and carried it off very well.

"What did you think of it?" We were fighting our way back to the car.

"The troops look pretty good. And Yang is business-like—surprisingly so. But it all depends on Nanking really."

That night there was a lantern parade through the streets of Sian, and the general air of festivities lasted for two more days. The Central troops had withdrawn from south Shensi; it was reported that they were moving out from the north and from Kansu as well. Hopes ran high in the New Year: the North-west was enjoying a kind of Indian summer. But that summer was destined to be brief.

A part of the New Year celebrations was a short season of patriotic plays. I heard all about these from our little interpreter Liu, who was very enthusiastic about them. They were being put on free, or at very low prices; and were intended to arouse popular interest in the "National Salvation" programme of the North-west. So for the next three days I became a haunter of the theatres of Sian, with Liu as a constant companion.

The Chinese theatre generally is in a stage of transition. What I had seen of "modern drama" in other cities had been rather disappointing; but in Sian, during this brief period of freedom from censorship, there were some novel and even startling developments. The Chinese are born actors—they can learn their "lines" in a night, or improvise brilliantly, if need be, on the stage. But the growth

of a new and contemporary drama has been hindered in China by the universal censorship, which is fatally discouraging to young playwrights. Other handicaps are the fixed conventions of the old formal drama, poor technique, and the indifference, if not the hostility, of the public. It is not easy to find an audience for the new drama, which must deal with current themes if it is to live. But the kind of realistic contemporary play that passes the censor is usually so emasculated that it would find survival difficult under the most favourable circumstances.

A way out is sought in an elaborate system of allusion and symbolism—as when a village terrorised by wolves is made to represent China invaded by Japanese imperialism. The popularity of such a piece as this—however thin the treatment—is a fair indication of the demand for stage and film handling of current problems. But the crippling handicap of a censorship that is sternly moral and Confucian (thanks to the New Life Movement), and politically pusillanimous, has inhibited the Chinese film almost as badly as the modern dramas. There have been a few good plays in the “modern” style, of course; and a few very good Chinese films. In the best of these, Russian influence has usually been dominant. But an indication of what the modern Chinese drama might be was given by the theatre in Sian during these fifty-five days. With complete freedom of treatment, with a burning theme and an eagerly receptive audience, some surprising results were obtained.

Several dramatic “units” were organised immediately after the rising of the “Double Twelfth.” One of these, which called itself the “Liberation

Theatre Group," was made up of professional Peking actors, and did some of the best-known modern pieces by writers like Hsiung Fo-hsi (whose recent plays, notably one about the Boxer Rising, have not escaped the ban of the authorities). Its productions were admirable, and the technique was a clever adaptation of formal Chinese acting to the realistic modern stage. But more interesting than these professional productions were the original efforts of several amateur groups, made up of students, soldiers, and more picturesque elements such as sing-song girls and "variety artists." These people wrote their own plays, sometimes individually, sometimes by a method of group composition strongly reminiscent of the "collective" plays produced by various units in the experimental theatre in Russia. The material, too, was rather similar to what used to be found in plays about the revolution and the civil war in Soviet Russia. The plays were frankly propagandist, as a list of titles would suggest —*On the Mouth of a Volcano; The Mother of a Nation; Raising Funds; On the Death Frontier; Withdrawal from Fengtai; Poor becomes Rich; The Moon Rises; After the Shanghai War.* But they were at least living drama, and not a pale imitation of Chekhov or Oscar Wilde.

I would go with Liu into a smoky and crowded theatre, whose galleries were always filled with soldiers; and where the audience would represent every conceivable section of society, from rickshaw coolies to old ladies with bound feet and carefully knotted hair. A band would be playing patriotic music: Chinese bands are excruciating as a rule, but

in the din of a Chinese theatre it makes little impression. The brassiest Western music is soothing in comparison with a Chinese theatre orchestra, such as plays in the old-style dramas; and it is against the sound of this that a theatre audience has learnt to converse with ease.

Before the plays began, a chorus of school children would sing National Salvation songs (a students' song-book of the last twenty years in China would be an interesting record of political movements). There would be the inevitable harangue on the patriotic duties of every citizen, with some vehement invective against the "traitors" who were selling the country to the Japanese. Then the curtain—a novelty, of course, on the Chinese stage—would go up and the action begin.

It was interesting to notice the reactions of the audience. Most of them were used to the old traditional drama, or to the modern farce that keeps very close to it. The "Peking drama" is a kind of opera-and-ballet in which familiarity with the plot is taken for granted; the chief feature is singing and dancing. A Chinese audience at the old drama is rarely silent, unless Mei Lan-fang or some such celebrity is singing a famous aria. This is one of the difficulties the spoken drama has to contend with: the audience will never keep quiet, unless its attention is seized and firmly held from the beginning.

And this, to an extraordinary extent, these topical Sian plays succeeded in doing. From a veritable bedlam at the rising of the curtain, the noise would subside to an amused hum of comment at the developing situation. If it was one that was easily recognisable—such as the plight of the Chinese

peasants in Manchuria, or an exposure of betrayal by "pro-Japanese" officials—the house would follow the action with rapt attention, punctuated by roars of approval or indignation. The atmosphere was highly charged with feeling, to which the actors themselves responded; the favourite style was melodrama, but it "went across" superbly.

I saw several of the "collective" plays more than once, and they were always adapted to the audience, not only in the style of acting, but often in the whole movement of the piece. They were taken on tour into the country as part of the propaganda work among the peasants and soldiers; they were broadcast over the radio, put on in the open at mass meetings. As a means of mobilising public opinion they were tremendously effective. Opinions will always differ as to the value of such drama as art; its value as social or political commentary is indisputable. But the success of this dramatic experiment in Sian (it has been carried much further, of course, inside the Soviet districts of China, where the theatre is a favourite means of political propaganda) was an interesting comment on the future of the Chinese drama.

The revolutionary theatre in Soviet Russia has shown the possibilities of artistic and creative expression with such material. And the Chinese mind—or the mind of modern China, at the least—has much in common with the Russian. Perhaps it is an awareness of the direction in which modern writing and the modern theatre would develop in China, if allowed a natural freedom of growth, that has so rigidly enforced the censorship in recent years. But it seems clear that, unless that censorship is some-

what relaxed, to allow a bolder treatment of contemporary material and a measure of political freedom, the development of all the arts in China will be fatally restricted. The universal sympathy and admiration expressed on the death of Lu Hsun, by common consent the greatest of modern Chinese writers, was somewhat ironical in view of his life as a political fugitive. But the young writers who grouped themselves around Lu Hsun, encouraged by his intellectual honesty and insistence on reality, have continued the effort to build up a living literature in the face of heart-breaking difficulties. Some of their work is now becoming known in translation;¹ and the Kuomintang, though it has made a resolute attempt, cannot kill all the good writers in China. Literature and all the arts, in this country that has so rich a cultural background, are inevitably bound up today with the great struggle for China's unity and independence. And with each positive achievement in that struggle, the frontiers of creative expression must be enlarged.

It was at one of these patriotic plays that I first came into contact with the foreign community of Sian. It was a curious encounter.

Liu and I had gone to an afternoon performance by students from Tungpei University at one of the largest middle-schools in the city. This was an old Chinese building, beside the peaceful walls of the Confucian temple. A large hall, redecorated in a vaguely Corinthian manner, had been turned into a theatre; when we arrived, a Chinese orchestra was

¹ See, for example, *Living China*, modern Chinese short stories compiled and edited by Edgar Snow. (Harrap, 1936.)

playing, but this soon gave place to a brisk band of students in uniform who played Russian tunes on mouth-organs. The place was crowded with the usual mixed audience; overhead were the flags of almost every nation except Japan, Germany, and Italy.

The first play (Chinese plays are always strung in a sequence, and often go on through a whole afternoon and evening) was based on what is known in China as the "Fengtai incident," a clash which occurred in 1936 between Japanese troops and the Chinese garrison on the railway near Peking, on the anniversary of the invasion of Manchuria. If you pass through Fengtai today, about a quarter of an hour before your train reaches Peking, you will see the Japanese flag flying over the station, and over a trim little group of buildings that are the Japanese barracks. There are no Chinese troops to be seen.

But on September 18th, 1936, there was still a small garrison of the 29th Route Army stationed in a wretched little building near the railway. That evening, as a column of Japanese troops was returning from manœuvres, a brush occurred outside the Chinese barracks: a Japanese officer's cap was knocked off by a common Chinese soldier, which was of course a mortal affront to the Emperor, besides being a gross personal insult. Apologies were demanded, and Japanese military police arrested the Chinese company-commander; but the Chinese troops withdrew inside their barracks and prepared to resist. The Japanese rushed up reinforcements, and the little Chinese barracks stood an all-night siege, with an overwhelmingly superior force occupying the roofs of neighbouring houses. The "battle of Fengtai"

caused some stir at the time, because a number of the more hot-headed Japanese officers wanted to seize the opportunity to take Peking. The incident was smoothed out the next morning, when the Chinese troops paraded under the Japanese machine-guns, tendered a formal apology, and withdrew south of the railway.

The whole affair lent itself to dramatic treatment; and the central figure was made the company-commander, who is released by the Japanese only when his men have been ordered to withdraw. He himself is cashiered for "causing an incident," and is replaced by an officer likely to be more amenable to Japanese methods. In effect, the play was a bitter criticism of the "policy of surrender" on the part of the Chinese authorities: the "will to resistance" on the part of the rank and file, their powerlessness under orders to withdraw, were clearly and convincingly portrayed. The play itself was a sound piece of work, and was received with immense enthusiasm.

The second play was more lurid. It was a student composition, and beside being ardently patriotic, it was frankly and militantly feminist. On both counts it would have challenged the Chinese censorship.

The villain, as usual, was a traitor: in this case a chief detective who has ruthlessly suppressed the patriotic movement. The play was a study of how his family—wife, son, and daughter—conspire to destroy him. First the son is entrusted with the task, but hesitates, Hamlet-like. His sister, hearing the issue, condemns him for a faint-heart, and herself volunteers to poison her father. To crown all, the mother comes in and insists that the sacred duty of destroying a traitor must be hers. The poisoning is

most ingeniously accomplished, and while the detective writhes around on a sofa, clasping his belly, the Woman stands with folded arms—a modern Clytemnestra—and refuses to telephone for a doctor. When the victim finally collapses on the floor, the avenger comes to the footlights and cries: "Women of China, arise! No longer be slaves! Save yourselves, and save China!"

The applause from the students was terrific; but some solid citizens at the back could be heard shouting "*Puhao! Disgraceful!*" and making a noisy exit.

In the middle of this excitement I had noticed a middle-aged European in dark clothes sitting quietly by himself in a front row, and obviously being amused. I pointed him out to Liu.

"A Christian!" Liu said immediately, as though he had made an amazing discovery. "You can tell from his clothes. I am not a Christian—are you?"

I replied non-committally. But to find a missionary here, in such a militant atmosphere, was rather like coming across a teetotaller at a Vintners' Dinner. We met in the street outside, and received a cordial invitation to tea at the Baptist Mission.

"What did you think of the plays?" I asked our host, as we followed him into the mission compound.

"Very interesting indeed. I know some of these young men well: they are members of my Bible classes." He sighed. "They are very enthusiastic just now."

We settled down into easy chairs beside a stove, and drifted into small talk. Liu was ill at ease, and wriggled about in his chair. I discovered afterwards that he wanted to relieve himself.

"Are you a Christian, Mr. Liu?" the missionary

asked him mildly, in a lull in the conversation. Liu looked most uncomfortable. Had I not been there, he would certainly have answered in the affirmative, just out of good manners. I knew he had been at a mission school. But his own bravado had betrayed him; he had assured me so very recently that he was an enlightened atheist that he could hardly go back on his word completely.

We both waited for his answer; I was enjoying the situation. But, like a true Chinese, he found a middle way. "I search in the Bible for National Salvation!" he announced. Our host looked a little puzzled; but perhaps he had met this kind of thing before. "Well, you might do worse than that," he observed. Liu gave me a look of sneaking triumph; he was obviously congratulating himself on his presence of mind.

I found in this first Sian acquaintance—as I had guessed, from his presence at the plays—a man of wide sympathies and liberal outlook. He had close connections with the young officials and students, and a large tolerance for their political activities. Like the American father we had met on the train to Shihchiachuang, he kept an open mind.

He spoke without resentment of the recent happenings in Sian. "We have seen so much here—revolution, and siege, and civil war. This last affair has been nothing. And many of the young officers, I know, are real idealists. Perhaps some good may come of it."

I admired his easy calm, though I wondered how many of his converts—like Liu—wore their Christianity lightly. The Chinese are not an irreligious people, as has sometimes been said. But they take religion, as they take life itself, pretty easily. Certainly

they have no room for one religion to the jealous exclusion of all others. This is perhaps why the crusading zeal of the first missionaries made, when all is said, so little headway.

"Come again," said the friendly missionary as we took our departure. "I'm sure you'd be glad to meet some of our other people." I wondered if they would be as glad to meet me.

When we reached the street, Liu relieved himself hastily at the first corner. "I think he is a good man," he said. "But I don't like foreign tea."

XV

MASS MEETINGS AND MISSIONARIES

"Who's the man with the monocle?" I asked Agnes one morning. There was a new arrival in the hotel. I had passed him once or twice in the corridor, with a vague impression of square shoulders and Savile Row.

"A foreigner? I don't know, but we can find out at the office."

The registration-card read "Capt. Scott, British Embassy, Peking." The outer world, it seemed, had broken through.

"I suppose he's come to look after the missionaries," I suggested. "Or to spy on the Red Army," said Agnes darkly. "You'd better go and talk to him." She seemed to feel I had a foot in both camps.

"*Ch'in lai!*" a voice said heartily in answer to my knock. And then, "Sorry—I thought it was that boy again. Come in, won't you?"

I entered a room that was littered with maps and hazy with tobacco-smoke. The Assistant Military Attaché looked at me quizzically through an eye-glass. We were the only two foreigners who had managed to run the blockade into Sian.

After the first formalities I asked the inevitable question, "Did you come by plane?"

"No, by motor-lorry from Tungkwan, with one of

these North-eastern generals. Never have got through the lines without him."

"Were there many Government troops in Tung-kwan?"

"Place was stiff with them. No chance of a decent lodging. I had to spend three days in a stinking dug-out. I found these things useful for fumigation; have one." He offered me a local Shansi cheroot. "Thirty for ten cents, but they smoke."

He had me at a disadvantage, coughing over a weed that was meant for camel-men or seasoned campaigners.

"What about this American woman, Miss—ah—Smedley? She's rather in on things here, isn't she?"

"Oh, I don't know." What had the missionaries told him, I wondered. "She came to Sian to write a book. I gather she's a sympathiser with the United Front, and all that."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Captain Scott absently. And then, as an afterthought, "These Communists in the North—they seem to be on the move. Marching very well, I hear."

"I really don't know much about it." I didn't; I had heard the rumours, of course; but the Red Army moves fast and secretly. "But there is a United Front here, you know, on the Military Council. If the Reds do come south, it will be on an understanding with the people in Sian."

"H'm, yes. But the missionaries don't like it much. They've had too many dealings with these fellows in the past."

That was the trouble. The Assistant Military

Attaché had come to investigate the position of British nationals in the "rebel" stronghold. Though there did not seem to be much danger in Sian at the moment, the position might be very different if the Nanking troops attacked; and once they heard the "Communist-bandits" were coming, the local missionaries got the jitters badly. I had heard enough "atrocity" stories from missionaries in other places to know their ideas on that subject.

The Red Army, in past years, had not been averse from picking up an occasional missionary in an out-lying station, and getting some free medical service out of him. But the atrocity tales—with one notable exception, the death of two American missionaries in Anhwei—were notoriously ill-founded. Even in this case, which involved the tragic death of a young missionary and his wife, it had never been proved that the "bandits" were regular Red Army troops.

Other cases of missionaries captured by the Reds had had a different ending. There was one Catholic priest in Kiangsi who lived for several years with the Red Army, spending most of his time debating the existence or non-existence of a deity with the Young Communist League. He was immensely popular with the Chinese Reds; and died at length of fatty degeneration of the heart.

But for nearly a year the Reds had announced a change of policy: in concentrating the anti-imperialist struggle against Japan, they were no longer against all foreign Powers in China. In the last months, a definite attempt had been made to win the interest and support of the foreign nations in their United Front programme; and at that time in Sian guarantees had been given from the Central Soviet Government

that no confiscation of foreign property (other than Japanese) would be carried out by the Red Armies.

There had been a change, too, on the question of religious freedom. In the North-west the Reds had come in contact with the Mohammedans of Kansu and Ninghsia; by following a policy of religious toleration, they had won the support of many of these ardent religionists, and had added some extremely efficient Mohammedan units to their fighting forces. In northern Shensi, the French Catholics are some of the biggest local landlords, and would formerly have been a natural object of attack for the Peasants' and Workers' Armies. But a curious compromise had been effected in certain districts where the Reds held military control. For example, in Tingpinhsien, a town of Lintiaoliang, near the Great Wall, the French Catholics had held for a year a kind of seigneurial domain, with their own government and laws, and a private army of converts (or mercenaries). Tingpin was captured by the Red Army; but there was no confiscation of land or decapitation of the foreign landlords: instead, the Reds had insisted on the granting of civil rights to the Chinese inhabitants, with their own right of local government and had left the Catholics undisturbed.

But the great difficulty for the Chinese Reds (as for the "rebels" in Sian) was always to give any publicity to their policies. Agnes Smedley and I were in touch with the Communist representatives in Sian, and had heard from them the complete statement of their changed attitude towards the foreigners and the missionaries. It was the missionaries, apparently, who were unwilling to hear it, and all our efforts to reassure them were fruitless. The Reds were "the Red

menace"; and our attempts to restate a policy already widely published in Chinese were construed very simply as "Red propaganda." I had a taste of this the morning after I talked with Captain Scott, when a missionary I had known in Peking came to see me.

He was a young man who always wore plus-fours and a college scarf, and resolutely refused to admit his missionary connections, apparently preferring to masquerade as an agent of the British-American Tobacco Company. In Sian he rode a motor-cycle, wore a black fur cap and a moustache brushed up at the ends, and looked rather like a Cossack. He was a novel kind of missionary, even in China, which has known most kinds.

"These English broadcasts from Sian are a disgrace to the whole foreign community," he asserted. "We ought to take out an injunction against you."

The offence, apparently, was that I had quoted an official statement from the Communist Party which had already appeared in the Sian newspapers.

"But this gives guarantees for the protection of missionaries. Isn't it relevant news, especially just now, when everyone seems so afraid of the Red Army? I should have thought you'd have welcomed it."

It appeared he did not. He was full of stories of Russian pilots who had arrived from Sinkiang, of foreign agents at work in the North-west, of the violent hostility against foreign residents. "Now that the Reds are coming, we know what to expect. Do you think they'll keep any of their promises?"

"Why not? They want their new policy to succeed, and they must win all the confidence they can; any

molestation of foreigners would be the worst thing in the world for them. And Russia has nothing at all to do with this movement—it's already been repudiated pretty thoroughly in the Moscow Press."

My Cossack was unconvinced. There was no "movement"; it was all the work of a bunch of Red agitators, among whom, it seemed, Agnes Smedley figured prominently, with myself as second string. I marvelled once more at the power of the Third International and at the prevalence of what might be called the "Peter Fleming mind," which invented the Russia Racketeers and the New Imperialists. Since the News was brought from Tartary (via Kashgar), Sinkiang has cast an ever-lengthening shadow.

The next day I went with Agnes Smedley to see a mass meeting in the country. Chang found a car for us, and came around to the hotel early in the morning. "You will need warm clothes," he told us. "It will be in the open."

It was a grey day, with mist along the hills and a hint of snow in the air. We drove out from the East Gate of Sian, along the familiar road to Lintung. But at the foot of Lishan we turned south towards the mountains, and followed a river-valley between snow-streaked cliffs of loess. The fields were deserted: great pyramidal tombs towered beside the road. We were making for a country town called Lantien.

"How many people do you expect to have at the meeting?" I asked our friend.

"About fifty thousand," he answered casually. Agnes started like a charger scenting battle.

"Peasants and farmers?"

"Mostly."

We had already begun to pass them on the road. Men in fur caps and padded jackets and trousers, women in feast-clothes, with freshly-folded kerchiefs. Sometimes a whole group would be marching from one village—bodies of *mintuan*, or peasant militia, armed with red-tufted spears and occasional rifles. It was an armed demonstration, and many of the farm-labourers carried staves and hoes. School-children in uniform marched proudly with their banners.

The meeting-place was outside the walls of Lantien. As we drew near the city, we could see the assembly-field, with a pavilion at either end. The familiar blue-grey of soldiers' uniforms was already visible between the stands. These were Shensi troops, stationed at Lantien: instead of bayonets, all carried coloured triangular pennants fitted to their rifles. The brown fields, barely tinted with the first green of the winter crops, had suddenly come alive with armed men.

Inside the city, at headquarters, we talked with the organisers of the mass movement. There were Red Army men among them, though the commandant was one of Yang Hu-cheng's officers. And they were not deterred by the unpromising weather. "Round here the peasants are well organised," they told us. They were not mistaken.

Warming numb hands over a charcoal brazier, we read the "Manifesto to the Peasants" which had been issued for the day. It was an outspoken document, which began without preamble:

"We, the Chinese peasants, have the worst life in

all the world. We work all year long, and cannot get enough clothes or food. We live in hovels.

Now, by the Chinese calendar, the New Year is coming. But is there anyone among us who can be happy in the New Year? Is there anyone with money in his pocket?

Japanese imperialism invades us day by day, and takes away our territory strip by strip. It buys over the pro-Japanese traitors in the Government, so that Chinese are set to fight against Chinese. In every way the people are squeezed and exploited. We must do away with the Japanese imperialist dwarfs!

Since the 'Double Twelfth,' Marshal Chang and General Yang carried out the people's will in arresting General Chiang Kai-shek, and demanding in the name of the masses their Eight-Point Programme and the reform of the Nanking Government. So all the North-west gets a new liberty. Now we can say what we want, and do what we want. We can arm ourselves, and struggle for a new road to life.

Fortune does not come from heaven. Fortune is the last resort of revolutionary struggle. Revolution is the business of us all. So we must unite together, organise, train, arm.

We will never have a road to life unless imperialism is destroyed. Come, we organise ourselves immediately to support the Eight-Point Programme, to strengthen the United Front of National Revolution!"

I looked across at Agnes. I could see her mind working on the same question as my own. For in this manifesto was the whole strength and weakness of the United Front position: how to combine the national with the social revolution.

This is one of the great problems for rural China; and China is still a nation of farmers. No one who knew the life of the Chinese peasants—especially in a

poor province like Shensi—could deny the truth of the picture so crudely drawn here. But if the peasants were organised and armed, would not their first instinct be to turn those arms against a more familiar oppressor than Japanese imperialism—against the landlord and the tax-collector, the money-lender and the grain merchant? We put the question to our political organiser, whose eyes narrowed shrewdly.

"Yes, this is a real problem. But that is the whole importance of our work. We can show the peasants that, however badly off they may be now, under the Japanese it would be much worse. Look at the thousands of farmers in Manchuria who have been compelled to burn their homes and move into 'protected villages'; who have had to raze their crops so that the kaoliang will not be a protection to the 'bandits,' who are their own brothers and friends! That is why the Tungpei army is so ready to fight—because they know what their parents and friends have suffered from Japan. We can show the peasants here in the North-west that they may be the next to suffer this.

"But with this anti-Japanese propaganda must go a demand for relief for the Chinese farmers. We must reduce the taxes, and give our peasants a better living. They know what the wars with the Communists have cost them in the past. All the peasants of China are against civil war, because they suffer most from it. Our programme for national liberation must also be a programme for social reform. When the national revolution is successful, the social revolution must inevitably follow."

He finished his exposition, looking almost apologetic. I had the feeling that he had only developed

this standpoint after a strenuous effort. But Chang nodded his head approvingly.

Then the telephone rang suddenly. High-pitched, excited voices. Soldiers crowded in from the court: there is no such thing as privacy in China. And this seemed to be important news.

Our political organiser returned, looking rather elated. "Now you see! The Japanese have made fresh demands on Nanking. The North-west, and the alliance with the Communists, must be suppressed by force."

"What does this mean?"

"The Central troops have come back into Shensi. Perhaps it means war—that is what the Japanese want. But now it is time to go to the meeting."

We made our way through narrow flagged streets, following the crowd out beneath the walls. The vast assembly-field was now almost filled, and dark figures were still coming from all sides across the plain. At the far end of the field, a Chinese theatre was playing in the open, with the snow-covered hills for a back-cloth. We could see the brightly coloured figures of the actors moving rhythmically in some kind of a dance.

A bugle sounded the call for assembly, and drew the crowd—fifty thousand had not been an over-estimate—towards the main tribune. School-children, still carrying their New Life banners, made up the first ranks. Beyond them were soldiers, and the red spears and pikes of the *mintuan* ranged in a wide crescent. And then the great sea of brown faces—Jacques Bonhomme, the peasant of China, was here with his family in impressive numbers. Women and

children stood in little groups on the fringe of the crowd. I had never seen so many peasants before: between these loess hills beat the heart of living China.

No brass-lunged town-crier could have reached across that crowd: and there were no loud-speakers. After a brief salutation bawled through a megaphone, three other platforms were rigged, and the meeting began. With intervals, and a constant change of speakers, it continued throughout the whole afternoon.

Everyone spoke—peasants, soldiers, officers, officials, school-teachers, school-children. And as fresh speakers mounted the platforms, fresh contingents of listeners crowded to hear them. The field took on the appearance of a country fair; on the edge of the crowd, family groups gathered, and ate food in the open from field-kitchens and provision stalls. The theatre was popular at intervals.

A mass meeting of this representative character had never been held in south Shensi before. To us it was a revelation of the strength and unity of the common people. For here the peasants heard their own problems discussed; the forced levies of rice for the anti-Red campaigns were condemned, the iniquitous surtaxes that took their last miserable savings, the notorious corruption of certain specified local officials. Many resolutions were passed before the afternoon drew to an end. And the one slogan that the hoarse voices took up most insistently, the shout that raised clenched fists above the shoulders of the crowd, was "*Chung kuo jen pu ta chung kuo jen!*"—Chinese don't fight against Chinese!

Yet at that very moment Nanking troops were

being moved back against the North-west; heavy guns were being rushed along the Lunhai railway to Tungkwan; tanks and aeroplanes were being ordered by Loyang. Before darkness fell, the Lantien garrison fixed bayonets where the coloured pennants had been, and marched away to the south. A new slogan echoed after them—"Protect the Anti-Japanese Revolutionary Base!"

"If Nanking does make war," said Agnes grimly, "they'll have to reckon with the armed masses. And then we'll see!"

The Lantien meeting was only the first of many in the weeks that followed. For the poor peasants of Shensi were good material to work on, as the Red Armies had found in the North. But no other meeting that I saw made so vivid an impression as this. With freedom of organisation, freedom to bear arms in their own defence, the power of the Chinese peasants might be incalculable. The Lantien meeting alone satisfied us that the United Front movement had a mass basis in the Chinese people.

The news that filtered through to Sian in those days was not reassuring. With the release of Chiang Kai-shek and the departure of the Young Marshal from Sian, the political centre of the Chinese crisis shifted to Nanking. It had really been there all along: only the dramatic events of the "Double Twelfth" brought it to the surface. Back in the capital, rival parties fought for influence; and no one was very sure of the real position of the Generalissimo.

The outward events which followed Chiang's return—the whole elaborate business of face-saving and face-making which so diverted the outside world—was far too sudden an anti-climax to be convincing.

The Young Marshal had been arraigned before a Military Tribunal and, on the last day of 1936, been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and five years' deprivation of civil rights. But this sentence was rightly regarded as a mere formality; three days later the culprit was granted a pardon from his sentence by the State Council, on the recommendation of the Generalissimo. The Young Marshal remained deprived of civil rights, and was kept a close prisoner, under the "strict surveillance of the Military Affairs Commission" (which meant, for all practical purposes, General Ho Ying-chin, Minister of War). He was politically impotent, and likely to remain so.

But one most interesting sequel to the release of the Generalissimo on Christmas Day was seen in two articles published in the representative British newspaper in China, the *North China Daily News*. When these articles arrived in Sian, they were the first clear indication we had that people outside were beginning to appreciate the real motives behind the Sian revolt. The *North China Daily News* has been known for years as the organ of British conservative interests—it was bitterly opposed to the Nationalists, before and during the Northern Expedition of 1926, until that campaign ended in the suppression of the Wuhan Government and the outlawing of the Communists. No journal in the country was less likely to sympathise with revolutionary action, still less with rebellion against an established Government.

The two articles were entitled respectively "Inside Story of the Sian Coup Disclosed" (on December 28th, 1936) and "Nanking Clique used Sian Coup to Grip Power" (published on January 6th, 1937). The source of these articles was not difficult to trace;

what was significant was their appearance in a responsible paper at this time. Here the real motives and demands of the Young Marshal were clearly stated and sympathetically discussed; and the second article in particular had some real "revelations." The failure of the Nanking Government to attempt to negotiate a peaceful settlement was analysed, and traced to the influence of a "dangerous clique" which had tried to use the Sian crisis to put Chiang Kai-shek out of the way and seize power for itself.

"Suddenly confronted by an accident which, in their eyes, meant the opportunity to dispose of General Chiang Kai-shek, they threw off the mask. They prevented any regular information or statements coming from Sian. They effectively persuaded or deterred the Government from taking the common-sense line and getting in direct touch with the 'rebels.' . . . The weather which prevented the punitive force from bombing Sian was to them a bitter enemy. They were further outwitted by the truces successively arranged, but they so nearly had their way that, when the Generalissimo arrived safely at Loyang, his arrival preceded by a bare hour the time at which the punitive force was ordered, on the termination of the latest truce, to proceed at once to the bombing of Sian—an operation which would unquestionably have destroyed the Generalissimo and all with him. . . .

General Chiang Kai-shek is fortunate in his newly acclaimed popularity, and also in the possession of some counsellors who are not afraid to tell him the truth, however unpalatable. If he draws the right lesson from Sian and realises that his danger there, after the first two or three days at any rate, came directly from Nanking, he will grasp that truth and set about cleansing the Augean stables. . . ."

This was a bombshell for Nanking, and the Secretary-General of the Kuomintang hastened to deny such malicious allegations, deplored the fact that "a paper with such high standards of reporting should have become a medium for such inaccurate reports." But the *North China Daily News* was unrepentant, and continued to thunder, though rather more gently. The appearance of these articles was the most encouraging sign yet: and it was not irrelevant that they should have appeared in a British journal.

For "cleansing the Augean stables" at Nanking meant, in effect, reorganising the Government along the lines recommended by Chang Hsueh-liang in his original manifesto. A new policy for China was in sight, and it seemed that it might be able to count on powerful allies. But the "dangerous clique" was pretty well entrenched at Nanking; and it appeared that Chiang Kai-shek, whether or not he had the will to challenge them, was going to take his time about it. He retired for a month's rest to his native town of Fenghua, thus leaving the field open to the "pro-Japanese elements" in the Government. The War Office in Tokio had made clear what it thought of a United Front policy in China, and Nanking took the hint. The concentration of Central troops at Tungkwan was alarming.

Inside Sian, the reports that Nanking was massing troops for attack caused a natural dismay. A "peace delegation" of bankers and industrialists left for Nanking on January 6th, but was not allowed through the lines at Tungkwan. On the same day, Yang Hu-cheng and the ten highest commanders in the Tungpei

and Hsipei armies sent a telegram to the nation, which read in part:

"... We 200,000 troops of the North-west hold the same opinion as Marshal Chang Hsueh-liang—all we ask is to be able, under the command of General Chiang Kai-shek, to use all our strength in opposing the foreign aggressor. . . . Do you remember that after Chiang Kai-shek had reached the capital, he ordered the Government troops to withdraw east of Tungkwan? And before he left Sian, he said: 'While I am alive, there shall be no more civil war'?

. . . Now ten divisions with their staff have collected and advanced beyond Tungkwan, challenging our troops. . . . If these people can find no better use for weapons bought with the life-blood of our people than to turn them against their fellow-countrymen, then—since our earnest desire for internal peace and a united war against Japan has been of no avail—we shall not regret giving our lives."

This message was followed two days later by a telegram signed by 126 senior officers of the same armies, expressing full agreement with Yang's position:

"The whole opinion of the Chinese people is resolutely in favour of resistance to Japan" (they wrote). "The Eight Point Programme of Chang and Yang expresses our own view of how this may best be achieved. . . . We, the commanders of the North-west United Anti-Japanese Armies, are all soldiers in arms. We are ready to a man to make the last sacrifice in defence of our nation."

Discounting the rhetoric, which in China is inevitable, the purport of these telegrams is clear enough. They were suppressed from publication by the Government; but many replies were received in

Sian, especially from the leaders of the South-western provinces, expressing sympathy and support for the North-west. There was a nation-wide reaction against civil war; but one strong party at Nanking was doing its best to make war inevitable. The reasons, of course, were the old familiar ones. The whole North-west, it was claimed, was under Communist influence. The Red Army was threatening the peace, and no course remained but to suppress the forces of these "rebels" who had made a common cause with the Communists. Nanking's tolerance was now exhausted.

From Fenghua, Chiang Kai-shek continued to send in his resignation to a Government that as regularly refused to accept it. But no one knew what rôle Chiang was really playing. A situation that his release from Sian had seemed to resolve had suddenly grown tense once more, and fraught with ominous possibilities.

XVI

THE GODS DEPART

“SHENSI CAPITAL IN HANDS OF REDS,” the headline ran. “REIGN OF TERROR IN WHOLE NORTH-WEST.” I dropped the paper and looked out of the hotel window.

There was a soldier on guard, to be sure, but he looked very comfortable in the shelter of the gate, smoking a cigarette and making the most of the clear January sunlight. I looked in vain for the Red Star on his cap, or the red arm-band that—the paper said—all the troops in Sian were wearing. Of course, he might have been a Communist in disguise; but he did not look very dangerous.

Four schoolgirls came up the drive and stopped to whisper together by the concrete fountain that was the pride of the Sian Guest-house. It was in fact singularly ugly; but the girls made a charming picture, with their bright-blue gowns and dark bobbed hair. There had been a time in China when any girl student with short hair might be shot on sight as a Communist (“bobbed-hair women bandits,” the official description had run). But these girls were as shy as kittens, and were clearly having great difficulty in making up their minds to enter the hotel. If this was a plot, it had not been very well prepared.

I was in the lounge when at last the quartet summoned up courage to enter the swinging doors. They

came up to the office desk, and one—plumper and bolder than the rest—began to question the hotel clerk in a low voice.

"Will you tell us, please, is there a Mr. Mao staying in the hotel?"

The Shanghai clerk, to gain "face," consulted his files, though he knew all his guests well enough. "No; we have no Mr. Mao. What is his full name?"

The girls whispered together again, obviously taken very much aback. "It doesn't matter, thank you," said the spokesman at last. "We must have made a mistake."

They went out slowly, disappointment in every line of their drooping shoulders. I noticed, suddenly, that all four were carrying autograph-books.

The Chinese are passionate autograph-hunters. Could it be?—in a flash of insight I realised what the children had been looking for. There was a rumour in Sian, which the Nanking Press had caught up and made into the usual lurid story, that Mao Tse-tung, Chairman of the Chinese Soviets, the most famous Red leader in China, was in Sian at the head of a revolutionary Government. And they had come to the best hotel in the city, to find Mr. Mao and get (if they could) his autograph!

At the least they were more trusting than Nanking, which had put a quarter of a million dollars on Mao Tse-tung's head, and was preparing united action against him and all his associates. But Mao Tse-tung was not in Sian—he had never left the Red capital in north Shensi. Chou En-lai and his colleagues were there, but kept very much behind the scenes. The

last thing the Reds wanted was the general alarm of an armed rising.

But the "Red menace"—illusory as it proved to be—was a very real factor in the developing situation. A mass meeting on an unprecedented scale had been announced at very short notice for January 9th; and rumours were current in Sian that a Communist rising was staged for this day. Something like an exodus of local inhabitants was threatened, and elements hostile to the "rebel" administration did their best to promote a panic. Shops put up their shutters, and pawnbrokers buried their treasure with dark forebodings. On the morning of the 9th, the city was prepared for almost anything.

What took place was a most convincing demonstration of the control and discipline of the United Front. No Communists appeared; no Red Army marched into Sian. Instead, an armed demonstration which may prove to be historic in the development of the mass movement in China filled the streets with more than a hundred thousand soldiers and civilians. It was the greatest popular demonstration ever seen in the North-west.

All morning the streets were filled with marching groups of men and women who began to converge about noon on the Park of the Revolution—a large open space, completely bare of vegetation, beside the walls of the Hsin Cheng. It was another day of bright sunshine, with a sun that was almost warm. When we arrived, making our way under the great *pailou* and past a couple of anti-aircraft guns mounted in open pits, the wooden stands and most of the arena were already filled with soldiers, townsfolk and country people. I had never seen so many banners.



THE MASS MEETING OF JANUARY 9TH

Some of the 100 000 soldiers and civilians assembled in the Park
of the Revolution



HITLER GREETS WANG CHING-WEI

A poster hanging from the tribune seen in the background of the

Across the front of the tribune stretched the legend: "UNITED ANTI-JAPANESE ARMED MASSES DEMONSTRATION OF THE NORTH-WEST." Beneath this was a large poster depicting that unpopular statesman Wang Ching-wei (who was then posting back to China from Europe) in the act of shaking hands with Herr Hitler. The German Fuehrer stood in his brown shirt amid a pile of skulls; before him the Chinese official bowed obsequiously. This was an echo of the universal indignation throughout China at the conclusion of the German-Japanese Anti-Communist Pact, and Wang Ching-wei was the most obvious symbol of those Chinese politicians who were prepared to co-operate with the parties to it.

The "armed demonstration" motif was carried out by all sections of the meeting. Soldiers had fixed bayonets; workers from the mills bore iron bars and wooden clubs; students and civilians of the Anti-Japanese Vanguard carried slung rifles. School teachers in uniform stood with their classes, the men with modern rifles, the children with ancient Chinese swords almost as big as themselves. Agnes was delighted to find our old friends the Red Army "boy prisoners," now very smart in new uniforms, with white cotton gloves tucked into their belts. Groups of peasant militia arrived continually. Among the great crowd of townspeople, all who had not a weapon of some sort carried a banner.

At one o'clock the meeting was officially opened by a single speaker from the combined National Salvation unions, who stated briefly that the arming of the masses in the North-west was a measure of self-defence against the "pro-Japanese traitors" at Nanking who were threatening civil war. The familiar

slogans were chanted; and then a military band struck up for the march.

First to move off was a detachment of Tungpei cavalry, the men sitting easily on their small shaggy ponies. The peasant guards followed them, their long red spears slanting back across their shoulders. Civilian units fell in behind—workers from the cotton-mills, both men and women, armed volunteers, the Anti-Japanese Vanguard with an enormous silk banner representing the “white mountains, black rivers” of the North-eastern lost provinces; dramatic societies, apprentices, schools, University students, each with their banners and slogans. The Women’s National Salvation Association, led by Madame Yang Hu-cheng, brought in the wives of prominent officials and officers: the procession was representative of all classes and groups in the North-west.

“Let’s cut through to the Drum Tower,” I suggested. “We’ll get a better view.” We slipped through the crowd and took rickshaws along the main street of Sian, lined already with waiting crowds of citizens. We climbed the ancient ramparts of the great tower which dominated the centre of the city, and looked east along the Hsi Ta Chieh. The first banners were already surging down the street like the crest of a great wave.

It seemed that they would never cease to come. Over a hundred thousand actually took part in the demonstration; perhaps half that number looked on. And all fears about armed insurrection were set at rest by the orderly way in which so vast a crowd was handled. From our vantage-point high above the



CHINA'S FINEST CAVALRY

Tungpu troops on their long-haired Mongol ponies in the procession which followed the mass meeting of January 9th



PEASANT GUARDS CARRYING THEIR LONG RFD-TUFTED SPEARS IN THE ARMED PROCESSION

street we could hear the shouts that greeted the procession—"Long live the Tungpei Army!" "Ten thousand years to the Anti-Japanese fighters!" And among them—strangest of all to hear from these sober citizens—"Long live the Red Army!" There was no more "Red scare" in Sian after that day.

Except, of course, among the missionaries. The news that Red Army troops had occupied districts only forty *li* away from Sian struck them with dismay. From their accounts, mission property had been seized, and the whole local population terrorised for miles around. It was easy to prove the inaccuracy of these reports. I tried to find a single verified instance of the molestation of missionaries, without success. But they built up into a most alarming picture of the plight of all foreigners in the North-west. And the British Military Attaché, as the only representative of a foreign Government in Sian at the time, was the special target of all these rumours.

Captain Scott was more frank than the missionaries.

"The only real danger for the foreigners in Sian, so far as I can see," he told me, "is from an air attack on the city."

"In other words, from Nanking?"

"Put it that way if you like. Of course, they don't trust the Reds; and they've had reason in the past to distrust them. But everything is quiet enough in Sian now. The big risk is from bombing—there's no real safeguard against that; or from a demoralised retreat, in case there's a defeat at the front."

It was a paradoxical situation. When Chiang Kai-shek had been detained at Sian, the chief threat to his life (it had now appeared) had been from his own

trusted associates at Nanking. The Communists had been largely instrumental in securing his release. And now the Communists were being blamed for the danger to the lives and property of missionaries in Sian, when it was clear enough to those on the spot that any danger there was came once more from these same quarters in Nanking that talked most loudly of the "Red menace," and urged the bombing of Sian as the next necessary measure to keep the peace.

"What do you think about the missionaries?" I asked Agnes Smedley, who had no cause to love them collectively.

"They needn't be so afraid of the Red Army, if they would only realise that when the Reds change their policy, they keep to the new one. In the past, the Reds were openly anti-missionary. They said the missionaries were spies for the foreign Governments, and so they were. But now they've announced a new policy of friendship towards all foreigners except the Japanese—and they'll do what they say. But I wish I knew where these alarmist reports came from."

Before long we were to find out. A certain American missionary who was in direct communication with his consulate at Nanking, and who had been so long in the North-west that he was regarded as an infallible authority on local politics, had been the oracle of the Sian foreigners. In some manner known only to himself, he discovered that he and his colleagues were being held as hostages against a bombardment of the "rebel" capital. He notified the American Consulate to this effect.

A hullabaloo was immediately raised in the foreign Press in China. This is the favourite slant for leader-

writers in any Chinese "story"—foreigners in peril, and missionaries for choice. The missionaries in Sian became martyrs overnight, and from this time the only word was "evacuation of all foreigners in the North-west." The death of the German dentist was recalled with a number of harrowing but highly fictitious details; and the foreign Powers were solemnly warned about their responsibilities for their own nationals. The "hostage" story was, of course, the merest fabrication of a lively fancy, but it worked the trick. Readers all over China hung on the fate of the band of foreign residents marooned in the North-west.

The Red Army was in San Yuan, about thirty-five miles north of Sian. This fact, which had paralysed the missionaries, had another effect on Agnes Smedley. For days she had been eager to be among these people of whom she had written so much but whom she had never seen in the field. Now she could hold out no longer.

"I'm going off to see the Red Army," she told me quietly. "It's a chance I may never have again."

For Ting Ling—perhaps the most famous woman writer in China—had just made a brief visit to Sian. Held prisoner for three years in Nanking, she had recently escaped from the Kuomintang, and managed to slip through the cordon and join the Red Army in north Shensi. Now she was at San Yuan, with the First Front Red Army under Ho Lung, famous among Chinese Red commanders. Agnes Smedley was an old friend of Ting Ling and could not resist the latter's invitation to visit the Red Camp and the Soviet region in Shenpei.

We had a modest little farewell dinner-party; the resources of the Sian Guest-house were getting rather low after almost a month's economic blockade. Agnes wore a Red Cross arm-band; "officially" she was going on a trip to the front to do first-aid work. It was a transparent disguise, but the less foreigners knew about Agnes Smedley's movements at this time, the better.

"When will you get back?" I asked her. "There may be a war yet; you'll be cut off completely there in the North."

Agnes was unmoved. "If there is war, that's just the place I want to be. I've waited too many years for this chance to miss it now. Three times before I planned to go to Kiangsi—and each time the plans broke down. This time they won't."

"Then you may be away for months?"

"I expect to be. I can finish my book on the Long March, and get all the material I've needed so long. But most of all I want to *see* things for myself."

I could appreciate her feelings. She had lived with the Red Army in spirit for so long; now at last she could be with them, travel with them, see for herself that life—strenuous enough even by Chinese standards—which was for her a foretaste of the China of tomorrow. I envied her the opportunity.

That was the last I saw of Agnes Smedley in Sian. She left the Guest-house early the next morning, a business-like figure in heavy riding breeches and the familiar red sweater. Always she wore it like a banner.

There are many kinds of revolutionary. My friend Miao, with whom I had travelled to Sian, was one of the most familiar Chinese types—though with

many eccentric features all his own. By nature the mildest of men, the injustice to his country, which he felt like a wound, had made him into a reckless conspirator, and even something of a terrorist. Chou En-lai—cool, level-headed, persuasive, a master of strategy—was the best type of Communist intellectual. Always he carried with him the air of a scholar and son of an old Manchu line. Clear thinking, and no hot-headed youthful impulse, had made him into a political worker, an insurrectionist, a Red Army commander. The best of the Chinese revolutionaries were the Communists.

But Agnes Smedley fell into no easily recognisable category. A passionate individualist all her life, the sordid brutality of her childhood in America had bred in her a spirit of revolt against the whole outside world. Early experiences had directed that revolt against established institutions of any kind; against marriage, against the family, against all that impeded her own free development and forced her brothers to become day-labourers or cattle-thieves or cannon-fodder in an imperialist war. Her first contact with Indian Nationalism had been purely accidental, though the Red Indian blood in her father's veins had perhaps given her a readier sympathy with all oppressed races. But once she had allied herself with the struggle of the Asiatic peoples for their freedom, above all, once she had come to China, it was the Revolution in the Far East that claimed almost her entire interest.

The theory of the Chinese Revolution—an intricate study which baffled the best brains of Comintern, and is still more a battle-ground of opinions than anything else—meant little to her; for she had no

strong theoretical approach to any problem. But the class struggle was a reality, for she had lived it. With a very imperfect knowledge of Chinese, she yet shared, in a way I could hardly have believed possible for a foreigner, the revolutionary instincts of the Chinese workers and peasants. She had the same resentment that they felt against the class enemy—the landlord and the money-lender; against the ruling official bureaucracy, against the agents of finance, capital and foreign imperialism. She saw everything in black and white: there was a revolution, and she was on one side of it—with the other side there could be no compromise. No doubt this direct attitude made her at times a difficult person for those who could only share a part of her sympathies. But all the restless energy that she possessed was bent towards a single task—to write the truth, as she saw it, about the Chinese Revolution.

We had met by chance; and had little enough in common by background and training. Agnes had an instinctive distrust of intellectuals; the detached study of a subject was meaningless to her. But we shared—and this was perhaps the one thing that made her tolerate me—an unbounded admiration for the common Chinese people: the mill-worker in Shanghai, the girl at the silk-looms of Canton, the peasant who worked his fields (or another's) through drought and flood and famine, with a patient persistence that is sub- or super-human. And, unlike those missionaries who call this "fortitude," and praise as a heaven-sent virtue this quality of patience that might be better ascribed to a necessitous fate, we felt, in this dumb ignominy of nearly a quarter of the human race, a theme for tragedy and not for wonder. The pitiful

inadequacy of "reconstruction," as practised by the present Chinese Government in certain rural areas, to provide a better living for the masses of the peasantry, is something so apparent to anyone who travels through the Chinese countryside that the name itself becomes a mockery.

One "road to life" for the Chinese peasant had been the way of the agrarian revolution; and for ten years the Red Army had followed it in the struggle for the Chinese Soviets. But China is still a semi-colonial country; so many specific features have hindered her free development, and in recent years a constant challenge from her nearest neighbour has threatened to reduce her to the status of a mere colony. Until this danger is removed, until the National Revolution is completed, the normal development of Chinese society can never continue. It was this realisation that had led Chang Hsueh-liang and the Chinese Communists to renew the old demand for a National Front of all parties against the common enemy. And if such a unity be achieved as a result of the Sian crisis, the effort would not have been in vain.

But at the moment, one had to admit, the outlook was not promising. Sian was completely isolated: the Press attack against the "rebels" and the "Communist-bandits" continued unabated. It was impossible to get news out, except by the radio, and that was most uncertain. The worst feature of all, from the point of view of "conciliation," was the exaggerated alarm of the local missionaries. They had no understanding of the real situation, and but a single emotion—fear of the Reds.

Mr. Li Wei-cheng was manager of the Provincial Bank of Shensi. He sat—a smooth, comfortable figure in a dark silk gown—in a room of his house behind the bank, and offered me a cigarette. Small children played about on the heavy carpet: Mr. Li, it seemed, was very much a family man. I wanted to know what he thought about the United Front.

"Of course, we bankers and business men are all for internal peace," he announced blandly. "You know, we sent a delegation to Nanking to ask for a peaceful settlement of this Sian affair. But General Fan Chung-pu, who is in charge of the Central troops at Tungkwan, told our delegation that he had two hundred aeroplanes ready at Loyang to bomb Sian. These are the same aeroplanes that we ourselves subscribed for, to be used in the defence of our country against Japan. It is a pity that General Fan cannot find a better use for them in Suiyuan."

The banker sighed, and flicked the ash from his cigarette.

"Now we are trying to get the help of foreign interests. This blockade of the North-west is very bad for all of us: and what reason is there for it now that the Generalissimo has been released? What patriotic Chinese wants to make civil war at this time?"

"What do you think about co-operating with the Communists?" I asked. "This seems to be the cause of all the trouble."

The banker smiled. "Before General Chiang was released, many of us were very suspicious of the Communists. We thought they wanted to kill General Chiang and make a revolution. But now we are convinced that they have really changed their policy.

"All the reports I have heard from the areas now occupied by the Red Army are very good. Everywhere the soldiers pay in cash: there has been no confiscation of money or property. It is much better than many "Government" armies that we have had. All the other banks send us anxious inquiries about the condition of Shensi and Kansu, and we can only say that *we* see no cause for alarm."

He chuckled suddenly. "The Reds have given us an invitation to go to the North to visit their own region, and see for ourselves how their economic system works. I should like to go very much; perhaps I may go, when this affair is settled. But how are we to convince the Government at Nanking about the true state of affairs here, when they will not see our delegates, and talk only about bombing Sian?"

He was a very honest man, and a firm believer in the National Salvation programme. If the Shensi bankers felt like this, why (I wondered) were the missionaries so worried about the Reds?

Sian was rapidly being turned into an underground city. The loess soil was easy to dig in, and everybody who had a back-yard dug a cellar in it. Companies of soldiers worked all-day shifts in the markets, making immense bomb-proof shelters. What archaeological finds this excavation of the foundations of an ancient capital brought to light remains unknown. The effort might at least have been used in the interests of science.

But the foreigners, it seemed, had had enough; they were taking no more chances. An American military representative who finally reached Sian by air, having been warned that his plane could only

stay a few minutes in so demoralised a city, was so agreeably surprised at the peace and order which prevailed that he roundly declared that his Government had been misinformed, and that evacuation of the foreigners was unnecessary. But this had ceased to be an academic question; all the missionaries from outlying stations had gathered in Sian, and there was a very real danger from air attack, to set against any hypothetical danger from the Reds. For that matter, it was not every day that foreigners in the interior had the chance of a trip to Shanghai, at the expense of their respective Governments. It was at length decided to evacuate.

But aeroplanes which had been chartered could not be persuaded to remain in Sian long enough to embark their passengers. There were several bridges down on the Lunghai railway between Sian and Tungkwan (it is a moot point as to whether these were blown up by the rebels or bombed by Nanking planes; but in either case, railway connections were impossible). Finally, arrangements were made to transport the foreign population to a more congenial environment by motor-bus.

On the morning of January 18th, the caravan was to start from the Sian Guest-house. From all quarters of the city, a miscellaneous collection of Europeans gathered around the doors of the hotel. There were bearded Italian priests, brisk Americans, and melancholy Englishmen. A cloud of children swelled their ranks—they were the only ones who seemed to be enjoying themselves. The size of missionary families in China is a perennial source of wonder to most travellers. Perhaps it is most easily explained on

economic grounds—there is usually a mission subsidy for every child.

Captain Scott, monocled and debonair as ever, directed operations with unobtrusive efficiency. Quite the most vocal member of the expedition was a fair young man with a loud voice who looked like a Viking, but was in fact a Swedish explorer who had arranged the hire of the buses from Loyang, and was the “leader” of the caravan. He spoke Chinese fluently and with truculence.

Among the crowd I noticed our friend from the English Baptist Mission. He was one of the few people in Sian who had steadily refused to get rattled, and I was rather surprised to see him here.

“Are you going with them?” I asked him.

“No; I’m staying here, with three more of my Mission. We have the hospital to look after, and it may be needed. In fact, I’m not so sure that all this is necessary—though I think we should send the women and children out.”

His quiet and unassuming confidence was very refreshing. A few foreigners, at least, had kept their heads. But the author of the “missionary hostage” story was badly shaken, and was dancing about in his impatience to be off.

At last the Swedish explorer had roared himself hoarse; the lorries were piled with luggage, and the party of some seventy-five nervous Europeans, with their ecstatic children, were settled in their seats. With a thunderous roar of heavy engines, the impressive motor-caravan ground its way out of the gates. The British Assistant Military Attaché accompanied them, to see the party through the

rebel lines. He was returning to Sian the same day.

Next morning I was roused from uneasy slumber by the opening of my bedroom door. A monocled eye gazed at me quizzically.

"Well—are you coming along? Your last chance for a free trip by plane, you know!"

"Thanks," I said sleepily. "But I think I'll stay on. It might be interesting."

XVII

THE NORTH-WEST IN ARMS

WITH the departure of the foreigners, Sian was left to its fate. It was a curious sensation to be in a beleaguered city that hourly expected attack. Nanking planes flew over every morning, keeping very high. The drone of the engines, the silver gleam of wings in the winter sunlight, were danger-signals for which one developed an uncanny anticipation.

One day Miao called in at the hotel. I had not seen him for a long time. He came and went as mysteriously as ever, always in a motor-car, with a fur-coated bodyguard.

"I am going out to the Military Training Camp at Wang Ch'u," he told me. "You should come with me, and see the real mood of the Tungpei army."

I was delighted to go, for I was getting rather bored with waiting for something to happen. Wang Ch'u, the Officers' Training Camp established by Chang Hsueh-liang nearly a year before, was the political centre of the North-eastern army, and was already historic. Throughout the whole movement in the North-west, it had played a part rather similar to that of the Military Academy at Whampoa during the "Ta Ke Ming"—the "Great Revolution" of 1925-27.

We drove out through the West Gate, past the old

T'ang pagodas that sentinel the plain around Sian, and out along the road that led towards the Blue Dragon Mountains. The Wei River curved through its wide valley: the hills beyond were unreal in mist, which hung along their writhing crests like the mist in a Sung painting. Over these five-thousand-foot mountains Red Army troops had come not long before, moving down to the south of the river. The foothills they crossed are littered with the tombs and temples of half a dozen dynasties.

Wang Ch'u was a little village beside the river, farther from Sian than I had supposed. The military school was built up on the loess terraces; most of the cadets lived in caves in the yellow earth. We were received with great ceremony, and after drinking tea, went—as Chiang Kai-shek had gone not so very long before—to meet the assembled officers in a large bare hall. Two hundred or so round cropped heads stretched before us in the dim interior. Some were men of more than forty years of age, with the rank of colonel, but most of them were younger officers and student commanders. It was here that my friend Miao had made some of his famous speeches, in the critical days of October and November.

He was holding forth at some length that morning: so after a formal reception, Liu and I went off for a walk with one of the cadets. It was almost like spring already on those fertile uplands, with the snow melting in the January sunshine. In front, the mountains swam like the fantastic cloud and cliff that only a Chinese brush can paint.

Beyond the village was a famous Temple for Officials, where all local magistrates and lesser dignitaries came to worship and bring gifts to the God of

Favourable Appointments. The bedroom of the god, which opened from the altar, was filled with ceremonial costumes and innumerable tiny pairs of embroidered shoes. A gentle Taoist monk led us through pavilions hung with scrolls and decorative tablets, the thank-offerings of grateful officials for profitable posts. Old China was eloquent in the muted grandeur of these walls.

But in the next courtyard was a printing press, and the pavement was strewn with the proofs of manifestoes. In the great court in front of the temple, a wooden platform had been hastily erected.

"Yesterday," our cadet told us, "we had a mass meeting of the peasants here. It was a very good meeting, and we decided to dismiss two corrupt officials in the *hsien*-town. Now the peasants have their own National Salvation Union, and are beginning to organise their own volunteers."

A new and awakening China was challenging the ancestral peace of this temple, where generations of sleek functionaries had celebrated their right to grow rich at the expense of the unlettered people. In the outbuildings, a library and reading-class for the peasants had now been established, where students from Sian taught daily classes. Outside the temple walls, a village school was gay with anti-Japanese posters, drawn with disconcerting humour by someone who knew to a nicety how to attract the quick mind of a child. Young China does not grow up today unconscious of the "Lost Territories."

We returned to the camp for lunch. We found Miao very pleased with the results of his speech. "These are the real army leaders," he confided. "The high commanders of the Tungpei army are very bad—all

except Marshal Chang. They think only of their own fortunes, and how they may keep their high positions. These young officers know the hearts of their men; and they will make the Tungpei army a real People's army. The old generals are feudal: they support Chang Hsueh-liang because he gives them power and money. But they do not agree with his new ideas; and that is why, in the months before the 'Double Twelfth,' Marshal Chang came out here to live with us."

After lunch someone suggested a shooting-party; so we set out once again up the river valley. For sporting-pieces, we had Chinese service rifles; I handled one of these gingerly—the mechanism of the safety-catch was obscure and alarmingly fluid.

"What are you going to shoot?" I asked Miao.

"Oh, birds," he replied vaguely. "White ones and black ones."

He meant hawks and herons, which were plentiful enough in the bare trees and beside the ice-fringed water. I did not like the idea of shooting herons; but I might have spared myself any scruples. Liu went down in approved military style to try a long shot at one of the graceful white birds; there was a terrific detonation, and a boulder about fifty yards in front flew into fragments. A donkey bolted across the shingle, pursued by an enraged peasant: the soldiers roared with laughter. The heron flapped its way lazily out of sight.

I tried a shot at a hawk, but the pin clicked harmlessly against the cartridge. "You can't fight the Japanese with this ammunition," I protested to Miao. "Japanese cartridge," a cadet said cheerfully. They

seemed to be able to get better results, for we advanced up the river-bed to a running fusillade. The noise was stupendous, but innocuous enough. We did not even hit a donkey.

"Try this," Miao said, suddenly producing an enormous Colt automatic from his overcoat pocket.

"You carry one of those things now?"

"They tell me that I must." He sighed. "Before, my work was too dangerous for me to carry a pistol. But now I may need it." I wondered just what was in his mind as I took the weapon. The Colt was very efficient.

The sound of firing had drawn an interested group of soldiers to the edge of the loess cliffs. But we soon gave up the shooting, to my great relief without casualties; I vowed I would never go out with an armed party of Chinese again. We climbed from the river-bed, past a huge bronze bell that hung from a marble slab. My friend stroked the smooth green patina with sensitive fingers.

"How many hundred years has it been here? But now I will show you something new."

At the top of the cliff was a neat little country lodge, beautifully built in modern Chinese style. It was luxuriously furnished, and commanded a magnificent view of the amazing mountains.

"This was built by Marshal Chang for his personal use," Miao told me. "But he never lived in it. The young officers said to him, 'Why do you spend so much money on yourself, when the country's need is so great?' Marshal Chang was very ashamed, and went down to live in the caves with the soldiers. This is where he slept." He pointed out a smoky little

hole in the loess cliff. "He lived there, and ate his meals always with the cadets."

This was another indication of the democratic spirit of the camp at Wang Ch'u, and of the change in the character of the Young Marshal. It was a very different atmosphere from the sort of thing he had been accustomed to for the last ten years. And that the influence of the young officers, and some others who came from the Red region in the North-west, had been very strong on their impressionable commander in such surroundings, was not difficult to understand.

We drove back to Sian before sunset, for the city gates were closed early. Miao left me to go to a meeting; he always had some appointment to keep. An hour later he was back at the hotel.

I felt his excitement immediately. "Any more news?"

Miao always enjoyed a dramatic situation. He put his finger to his nose, and whispered the one word "War!"

"Negotiations have been broken off!" He nodded.

"Our delegates have just got back from Fenghua." This was the native town of Chiang Kai-shek, where he had withdrawn ostensibly for a temporary rest, and taken Chang Hsueh-liang with him. "They flew first to Nanking, and were arrested by General Ho Ying-chin. When they were allowed to go on to Fenghua, the Generalissimo would not see them. They waited two days; and then he told them that unless the North-west surrenders unconditionally, the Government will attack at noon next Friday."

That was in three days. "Did they see Chang Hsueh-liang?"

"Not alone; he is very closely guarded. But he told them to go on, and do whatever they thought best. And not to consider his own safety."

Miao was very much moved. "Marshal Chang is so big—and Chiang Kai-shek is so small—'small heart!' But he is very cunning." He made a gesture of frustration. "Now we must fight Nanking—must fight our own countrymen, and take the blame for another civil war. But it is the only way."

"It cannot be avoided?" For this sounded really serious.

"I think not." He pressed my hand warmly. "You should go to the front, now, to see the Tungpei troops. I will get you a pass."

"Fine. I'll go tomorrow."

"Good-bye. Perhaps we may not meet again in England—now!"

He slipped out of the room, and I heard the car roar past the gates. I did not see him again.

Liu had found a friend who was doing political work with one of the Tungpei regiments at the front. Armed with a military pass, we set out early in the morning for Weinan, which was as far as the railway ran. It was only a few miles from Chihsui, the front line of the "rebel" defences.

We were just in time at the station, and had to leap across the rails and make a flying dash for the train. It was more crowded than any train I had ever seen, even in China. There was a rough equivalent of three classes, the most luxurious being ordinary Third-class carriages with wooden seats. "Second" and

"Third" were respectively mail-vans and open trucks. But it was one of the friendliest trains I have ever travelled in.

Nobody had a ticket, as far as I could see: and it would have been impossible to collect it, if they had. I sat on the floor, between a group of soldiers, and a peasant woman who was nursing a baby. Liu's friend was talking hard to a local shopkeeper, telling him about the great student demonstrations in Peking at the end of 1935, when General Doihara's scheme for an autonomous North China had *not* come off. He soon had a circle of listeners.

Everyone was reading the morning papers; the news was pretty thin, for all foreign news was limited to what could be picked up by radio. But the soldiers especially devoured it with consuming interest, spelling out the characters with painful concentration. I watched the wall of the city slide past; saw the peaceful Shensi countryside, with the day's work already begun in the fields. Families were eating a morning meal in their loess cave-dwellings. Nowhere was there a sign of unrest.

Lintung, and the Lishan hills—still covered with snow—came into view. Here there were soldiers; but no visible trace remained of the sharp engagement on the morning of December 12th. The train broke no records for speed, but by midday we had reached Weinan.

The railway station here had been the objective of the biggest air attack launched by the Nanking bombers after the "Double Twelfth." Our train emptied out its passengers on to a platform still scarred with battle. The station buildings were in ruins, though the broken pillars carried a brave show

of anti-Japanese posters. On the sidings near the station stood rows of wrecked and twisted trucks. Near the main line an immense bomb-crater had been partially filled in, but still yawned cavernously. At the bottom lay the remains of what had been a motor-lorry.

Opposite the station there had been a large new factory—the Weinan cotton-packing plant. This was now completely wrecked; it had been an easy target for the thirty “birthday planes” that had come over on their patriotic mission of December 16th. Whether the airmen thought the rows of regular, dark-grey buildings looked like barracks, or were just looking for something to bomb, is not clear. But with no more warning than the roar of the approaching motors, men and women workers had broken from their benches on that Wednesday after Chiang Kai-shek’s capture, to find bombs raining around them, and the ground sprayed with machine-gun bullets. We saw in the yard of the factory the earth still stained with the blood of Chinese workers. The local authorities told us that there had been more than a hundred casualties in the raid. Thirty workers were killed at the railway station alone.

This seemed to us a strange method of upholding the dignity of a Government in an internal crisis. It also gave us a vivid idea of what might be expected in Sian, if General Fan were able to fulfil his boast about the two hundred bombers at Loyang. The destruction of this factory at Weinan was indeed an excellent illustration of the futility of reprisals in civil war. The damage of several hundreds of thousands of dollars was sustained by Shanghai financiers; the dead were—also Chinese.

Weinan, which I remembered from the short glimpse I had had of it arriving in the truck with Miao, was a straggling town with a broad new main street. But to the east, as we now discovered, was an old walled city. The streets we passed through were filled by the kind of crowd one might have expected to find near a military front. Soldiers—chiefly Tungpei men—by the hundred; military trucks; cavalrymen with their long-haired ponies; carts, wheelbarrows, and bearers and pedlars of all kinds. Restaurants and food-shops did a roaring trade; nowhere—which was perhaps unusual—did we see any signs of friction between troops and civilians. It was a scene of immense but ordered activity.

In the centre of what would be the market-place or butter-cross in an English village, crowds had gathered around the base of a square watch-tower to read a wall-newspaper. In broad white lettering across the weathered brick ran the familiar inscription (dating from before the "Double Twelfth"): "Support Chiang Kai-shek, the Revolutionary Leader." Beneath it were the manifestoes and proclamations of the North-western Military Council. It was these the readers were intent upon. We passed through the gates of the old city, and set out towards the hills.

It was easy to trace our objective—a small village right in the front line—once we had climbed the barrier of hills. We simply followed the telephone wires. These wound picturesquely up the hillside, trailing nonchalantly across temple-roofs, and taking advantage of every tree and grave-tablet to clear the ground. After a double twist round a stone *pailou*, they led us finally across trampled fields to a group

of houses around a narrow sunken street. Here the regiment we were looking for had its quarters.

We discovered the colonel in a dark little room that was half filled by a gigantic k'ang. He lit a candle in our honour, and poured luke-warm water—a disconcerting yellow in colour—from a thermos flask. We settled down to discuss the situation.

This was a Tungpei regiment, which had been stationed in Mukden before the loss of the North-eastern provinces. It had been withdrawn to Peking; and then had travelled a weary round of half the provinces of China—Honan, Hupeh, Hunan, Kiangsi (where it had fought the Red Army, and learnt what real fighting was); then transferred to north Shensi, and up to Ninghsia to meet the Communists in the North-west. And all this time with a growing resentment against the orders that sent it to fight against fellow-countrymen; with a growing determination to fight back to its homeland, or at least die fighting for a cause it could believe in. The story was the story of the whole Tungpei army; the mood it evoked the whole stormy background to the mutiny of December 12th.

The colonel was a quiet little man, over forty, and anything but demonstrative. But he spoke bitterly about that last expedition to Ninghsia.

"Why should we go on fighting the Reds," he exclaimed, "when all we want is to fight the Japanese? Now, since the 'Double Twelfth,' it is much better: the Red Army will fight with us against Japan. We are all military comrades."

"What about the position now?" I asked, remembering Miao's warning. "You may have to fight Chinese again."

He shrugged at this. "The Central troops do not want to fight us, and we do not want to fight against them. But General Ho Ying-chin and the others at Nanking urge them on. If only General Chiang would keep his promise, there would be no more civil war. So far there have only been skirmishes, when the Central troops advanced. And then most of them shot in the air, rather than shoot at us."

He chuckled. "When General Ho fights, he sends over aeroplanes to drop leaflets, telling us to be obedient to our leaders, and saying that Marshal Chang does not want us to fight. But the other day, a Tungpei company-commander stood out on a hillside and spoke himself to the troops of General Ho Ying-chin. Although it was within easy range, no one shot at him."

There seemed to be a general feeling that if an advance were ordered, the Government forces would not be over-anxious to fight in earnest. But the North-western troops were not relying on this overmuch: they had built monumental fortifications along the rim of this plateau, and were dug into a position from which only heavy artillery could well dislodge them.

The colonel gave us horses to ride along the front—Mongol ponies in their heavy winter coats, with tufts of sheep's wool on the stirrup-irons. It was quite a picturesque cavalcade, though Liu had never been on anything more formidable than a donkey before, and the peculiar jolting trot of the Mongol pony is not the easiest of gaits.

Half an hour's ride brought us to a hill outpost, where a battery was stationed. We called in at a

neighbouring temple to pass the time of day with the battery commander.

This was a younger man, a friend of Sun Ming-chiu's—powerful, energetic, trained in Japan and, I suspected, a good enough gunner. He talked with explosive violence, as though he were giving orders to his battery in the midst of a bombardment.

And there was nothing half-hearted about his opinions. He expressed a point of view that I had met before, especially among the younger Tungpei officers. "It's not the leader that counts—leader or no leader, we go on with our anti-Japanese programme." Like so many others—officers and men alike—he spoke of Chang Hsueh-liang in terms of almost personal affection, calling him the "wise commander" (which is an official title, but can be something more than that). This artilleryman was no sentimentalist, however; he had clear-cut ideas of his own.

"Sooner or later we must fight Japan," he declared roundly. "General Chiang has said that he will lead us; good, we will follow him. But now he holds our own commander under arrest. That will not stop us; if Marshal Chang were to come back to Sian and tell us not to fight, that would not stop us either. If we cannot fight Japan directly, we will fight to find a way."

He thumped the table for emphasis, spat vigorously, and suggested a walk round the lines.

The misted line of the hills was lost in shadow; the snow slopes had the glow of evening. But with the aid of field-glasses, it was still possible to make out the position of the Government troops. We

picked them out, looking across the trained muzzles of his guns. In front was the plain, peaceful and friendly in the soft light. Across it moved donkeys, dawdling carts, and tiny human figures. Would the guns speak out, to shatter their world?

Three weeks before, one could have said the answer lay with General Chiang Kai-shek. And he had given that answer—honestly and unequivocally—at the Sian air-port on Christmas Day, when he had said, “While I live, there shall be no more civil war in China.” Had General Chiang forgotten? Or was it that he no longer spoke, as he had spoken to Sun Ming-chiu on the morning of his capture, “I am your Generalissimo. I am the leader of China”? Perhaps the answer lay for the time being with others in Nanking. Or with a War Ministry in a more distant capital.

Back in the village, we were given a room for the night in a small peasant house that had been rented by the regiment. Here we sat on the k’ang (which was rather inefficiently heated by charcoal, and smoked abominably); and talked with more of the Tungpei troops. The group included a young captain, a regimental servant, and a number of soldiers.

The servant was from Peking, and spoke fluent mess-English. He had been a “boy” in a foreign hotel, and also spoke “Rooshian.” He handed enamel bowls of tea with the air of an English butler.

The captain was a Manchu, from the old nobility—slight, with shaved head, fine features, and a sensitive mobile mouth. He talked with real eloquence, and with swift, nervous gestures.

"What is this question of governments?" he said. "In China we were supposed to have a choice between democracy and dictatorship. When I was a military cadet at Loyang, they always gave us this essay to write—'What is the best form of government for China?' We all wanted to write in support of democracy—China once had a dictatorship, under the Manchus; and the people suffered. But the authorities told us we should praise dictatorship for China, and Chiang Kai-shek as the dictator. No one dared to write as he thought."

He thought for a minute. And then he continued with sudden warmth: "What are the questions we must ask of a leader? One, above all: 'Is he a revolutionary or a counter-revolutionary?' Chiang Kai-shek claims to be a revolutionary leader: but he wanted to be a dictator. What about Chang Hsueh-liang?

"Chang Hsueh-liang is a young man, without very great political understanding. But we know from his actions that he has always had the right feeling towards the Chinese people. In Manchuria, he built railways to compete with the Japanese; he built the great arsenal in Mukden. It is not Marshal Chang's fault that all this was lost to the Chinese people—everyone knows that when the Japanese invaded the North-eastern provinces, Chang Hsueh-liang was ill in hospital in Peking.

"But he founded schools and universities, and still tried to help the people. He tried sincerely to work with the Kuomintang, until he changed his own opinions. He came to believe in the united front of national resistance. So we had the 'Double Twelfth,' as a protest against dictatorship, against the auto-

cratic policy of the Kuomintang. And we too believe in this democratic United Front.

"Here I am now"—he threw out his hands in a movement of impotence—"I am not Kuomintang. I am not Communist. I am not Nationalist. But"—and the small, delicate hand was clenched—"now we all fight together for our programme of national liberation. This movement can never be split, as other movements in China have been split, by buying off leaders. It is a movement of all classes, with the whole people behind it."

This was an intellectual's summing-up of a position that was commonly held by the whole rank and file. I talked with Tungpei troops on the parade-ground, in the trenches, on the train back to Sian. And only this direct contact could give an adequate idea of the anti-Japanese feeling of the Tungpei army.

"Are you against Japan?" was the first question I was always asked. But I had come to put questions, not to answer them. And the question I asked everywhere—"What about the Red Army?"—had its best answer from one weather-beaten soldier, who pushed back his fur cap and commented:

"We fought the Reds for ten bloody years; and the longer we fought, the more we knew that we were brothers. We are homeless in China, and so are they. Why shouldn't we fight together to win back our lost territories?"

The morale of the North-western troops, I decided, was excellent. But the position that they were holding—a line of front running north and south about a hundred *li* east of Sian—was rather an awkward one.

The mistake had been (from a military point of view) the failure to seize Tungkwan; the betrayal of Feng Ching-tsai had lost the "rebels" this advantage. From this narrow pass they might have held the whole North-west.

But if the peasants in south Shensi were armed and organised, they could be a more than useful reinforcement. And the Red Army was holding either flank of the front line—the southern flank in mountainous country that was ideal for their kind of fighting. Central troops, one felt, would not be over-anxious to advance along a river-valley that left Red Army units operating in the hills in their rear. It was a military stalemate.

But everything depended on the attitude of the Red Army.

XVIII

THE RED ARMY MARCHES

AGNES had vanished into the blue: I had expected some kind of communication from her, but none reached Sian. From a Chinese friend I learnt that she was still at San Yuan, where Ho Lung and the Second Front Red Army had their temporary headquarters. Peng Teh-huai and the First Red Army had moved to the south. In fact, the Red Army was all around us; and so far I had not seen any of it.

Liu, the student interpreter, was almost frantic with impatience to visit the Red camp. Like many young Chinese leftists, he had an overwhelming admiration for Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung and the "Peasants' and Workers' Army" (which had now, by a significant shift of emphasis, become the "People's Anti-Japanese Army"). We met Communist delegates and Red Army men occasionally in Sian, wearing common clothes or plain official uniforms: but this was not the real thing. We wanted to see the Red Army in the field.

But at this time it was not easy to get out of Sian. Petrol reserves were strictly rationed, and it was impossible to get a car or even a truck. Every kind of motor conveyance had been commandeered for military purposes. We thought of hiring a horse carriage, but this is the slowest and most depressing means of transport in China. We could only make a

short visit, for I did not want to get too far away from Sian, when at any moment a war might begin.

At last we decided that we could wait no longer. All else failing, we would set out in search of the Red Army on bicycles.

We managed to borrow one of these from the hotel—it was an ancient vehicle, with a large enamelled plate in blue and white lettering which read (in both English and Chinese) "China Travel Service." Liu mounted it with grim determination: the amount of "face" he lost was enormous, but it was a sacrifice in the good cause. I found another bicycle at the headquarters of the Mass Movement Committee, and we set off together through the South Gate.

We had heard that there was a part of the Fourth Red Army at Hsienyang, the nearest town west of Sian along the highway to Kansu. Whether they would still be there or not was uncertain; but if we could not find this troop, we intended to push on to San Yuan to see Ho Lung. It was infuriating to have to depend on such inadequate means of transport.

We cycled across bare open country, into the teeth of a bitter wind from the Kansu mountains. On our right was the railway: there was supposed to be a regular train to Paochi, at the end of the line, but no one ever knew when it left, and we preferred to be independent of public conveyances. We passed through wretched little villages of mud and clay, where there was no tea to be had—a sure indication of poverty in China. After about two hours on the road, we came to the river again. Across it were the walls of Hsienyang.

Inside the city, we made for the Student Propa-

ganda headquarters, where Liu had some old Peking friends. We found them in a single room of a new shop building, whose walls were covered with posters, and where most of the space was taken up with trestle tables on which the propaganda party worked in the daytime and slept at night. We inquired after the Red Army.

. There were no Red troops in Hsienyang itself, we discovered. But a group of several hundred were stationed in villages another thirty *li* to the north. These might be difficult to find; their precise whereabouts were uncertain. But a Red Army propaganda corps was still located somewhere to the east, and the students gave us a guide to help us find them.

After a meal we set out again—it was now afternoon—and took a road leading out from the East Gate of Hsienyang. Not far in front of the gate was a level crossing, where the Paochi railway left Hsienyang station. A large alcohol factory was smoking behind the station buildings. Pyramidal tombs of yellow earth were golden in the sunlight.

We had only been going a few minutes when "Look!" Liu exclaimed suddenly, and nearly fell off his bicycle in his excitement. "Red Army!"

At the level-crossing a group of men were sitting about in the middle of the line. There were a couple of peasants, and one or two others who looked like railway workers. But there were three soldiers, who seemed to be doing most of the talking.

They lounged easily, arms crossed over battered rifles. They wore the common blue cotton uniform of the Chinese soldier, no better and no worse than the average. But their caps were black, of a peculiar

peaked shape; and in the front of the cap, in place of the familiar white Kuomintang sun, was a red five-pointed star.

This was the Chinese Red Army soldier—a peasant with a rifle captured from Government troops, with a bomb and a hand-grenade made in a Chinese Red arsenal, who had marched the length and breadth of China, fighting for the Peasants' and Workers' Soviets. In a dozen provinces he had become a legend; even in the eyes of the disinterested foreign scholar he was a man who had made history.

We stopped to ask them where the main party was quartered. The Red Army men remained sitting nonchalantly; their gaze was critical but not unfriendly. One of them waved an arm towards the loess cliffs ahead. "Up there," he said. We parted cheerily, and went on our way. The sight of a foreigner—strange enough in these parts at such a time—did not seem to make much impression on them.

For two solid hours we searched the maze of cave-dwellings and villages without avail. Wherever we went, we got the same answer:

"Soldiers? What soldiers—*Red Army*?" No, they had not seen the Red Army. And shrewd eyes narrowed under fur caps as they watched us depart.

It was a curious experience. Ask any peasant or farmer where the soldiers are in any garrisoned area, and you will not get a hesitant answer. "Soldiers? Those bastards are everywhere. They took my cousin's house last week. . . ." There is no love lost between the Chinese peasant and the forces of "law and order." He knows them of old.

But we could find no one to tell us where the Red Army was, until we returned in desperation to the railway crossing again. The three soldiers had vanished; but one of the peasants who had been such an interested listener before, and had seen our friendly encounter, finally undertook to guide us to their quarters. He would take no money for this service. I began to understand one secret of the Red Army's strength: always, it seemed, the country people would give them protection and assistance that they would give to no other troops.

We went direct across-country, passing the walls of the alcohol factory. It was evening already, and mist was beginning to rise from the river-flats. Suddenly, as it seemed from nowhere, we were joined by two men with rifles. They had grown out of the shadows by the factory wall. One was a boy of fifteen, with a Mauser pistol tied over his shoulder by a rough cord; he wore rope sandals. We were formally escorted to the Red camp.

A little village of clay huts huddled against the loess cliffs. It was guarded by a wall, outside of which children were playing, while old men smoked their evening pipes in the open. The scene was peaceful enough; our guides, as we crossed to the wall, exchanged greetings with the villagers.

"Are you afraid of the Red Army?" our student propagandist asked one group of children. The answer was a peal of laughter; the old men chuckled and wagged their heads. "The Red Army is the army of the peasants. It is the army of the Chinese people." The propaganda party had not wasted its time.

Inside the wall, a troop of some forty soldiers were

quartered in two small houses. We were welcomed by their commander—a youthful commissar in a black uniform who might have been a few years over thirty. He was the oldest man in the party; the average age of the rest, I calculated, was about seventeen.

They clustered around us like schoolboys—these youths who were more heavily armed than any Government troops I had ever seen. The cleanest thing about most of them was their revolvers, but all had the glow of health, and a steady look about the eyes that would have marked them out from any other group of Chinese of their age. A boy of thirteen, with an enormous hand-grenade bumping from his belt, brought us tea, laughing all the time at the strange appearance of the first foreigner he had seen.

There is something the Red Army does to its young recruits. All who have come in contact with the Chinese "Reds" (and this includes, in recent months, a number of American journalists) have noticed at once the change of personality they put on with the red star. There is gaiety, comradeship, a touch of recklessness—for the average age in the Red Armies is probably under twenty; but there is also a strength and self-reliance which is not common among Chinese brought up in the old family traditions. With this goes an openness of manner that is curiously Western; the whole personality seems to come to the surface.

This troop belonged to the Fourth Front Army, under Hsu Hai-tung; they were comparatively "raw," as compared with the veteran troops of Pen Teh-huai and the First Red Army. But most of these youngsters

had been with the Reds for five or six years, many having begun as *Hsiao hung kwei*—"Little Red devils." They were very representative of the rank and file of these peasant armies, for there were no students or intellectuals among them. Only the leader had been a city worker; and this again was characteristic of the way the cadres of industrial workers had been given the leadership among these slower-witted farmers' sons.

I was introduced as a foreign journalist from England. "Good," said the commissar. "You can give us a talk on European politics." I was hardly prepared for this, but rashly said that I would be glad to answer questions about Europe. They were obviously eager for outside news.

The room filled up with young soldiers, who came and went without embarrassment. I sat on the *k'ang* with Liu, and the questions began to pour in.

What was the latest news from Spain? Would England and France intervene against the Fascists? Would Britain join the Franco-Soviet Pact? How was the Labour movement in America? Had people in England heard of the United Front in China?

I was amazed at the range of questions, and at the knowledge of international politics that they assumed. These men were peasants from Honan and Szechuan and Hunan. One or two of them had been apprentices; their leader had been a railway worker in Hankow. All had learnt to read, and most of them to write, in the Red Army. And they had learnt there —this was the most impressive thing of all—that their own problems were only a part of the world problem.

Where the Tungpei troops had talked of fighting Japan as "a sacred duty," and had wanted to know the attitude of such countries as Britain and America to the struggle for China's independence, the Red Army men had an outlook that covered—however sketchily—the whole world-struggle against Fascism and imperialist war. I am not trying here to idealise the Red Army of China; my own contact with it was so brief as to give only the briefest of impressions. But I know that we had a more intelligent discussion about world politics in that little loess village, with a group of peasant soldiers who by any Western standards would have been considered uneducated, than I have had in many so-called centres of learning in other parts of China. It was not hard to guess the reason.

The commissar wanted to give us a special feast that night; he had old-fashioned ideas of hospitality. We protested vigorously, but the villagers came in of their own accord with gifts of meat and vegetables, so that almost before we knew it, we were sitting down to a good country meal. Nuts and sweets had been bought in our honour. The commissar placed us ceremoniously at the one small table, though I noticed that he ate himself only coarse mien and gruel and wheat-cakes like the rest of his men, who had gathered around the k'ang and an enormous iron pot at the other end of the room. He offered us cigarettes—"Ch'ien Men," which is a luxury brand in a Chinese village—but he would not smoke himself. Liu, the complete hero-worshipper, put his cigarette carefully away in his pocket. A gift from the Red Army was to be treasured.

After supper it was our turn to ask questions. I had heard the new policy of the Communists outlined by their own spokesmen in Sian; but I wanted to find out at first hand the rôle of a propaganda party in the field.

"What do you tell the country people that you meet? Is the Eight-Point Programme of the Sian rising enough?"

"No, of course it's not enough," the young commissar replied. "But it is a good beginning, along democratic lines. The conditions for a true democracy do not yet exist in China; we believe that at the present time the United National Front against Japan is the most important thing of all. But certain rights and guarantees to the people must go to the building-up of that National Front. Political freedom is included in the programme of the North-western leaders. But we must assist the Chinese farmers, and improve the living conditions of the Chinese peasants and workers."

"How do you propose to do this, if you abandon your past policy of confiscation of land and class discrimination?"

"First we must reduce the taxes. Then we will confiscate the land and property of all pro-Japanese traitors who will not help us in our fight for national liberation, and give it to the poor people and the anti-Japanese fighters. We demand the provision of free education throughout all China. These things we can do in our own Soviet districts, and they should be done by the National Government over the whole republic."

"I see. Would it be fair to describe your policy as a limitation of the old one—instead of attacking im-

perialism and the landlords, now you attack Japanese imperialism in particular, and any Chinese who give it their acquiescence or support?"

"Yes. This is a change of policy to meet the immediate objective situation. We want to co-operate with all the genuinely anti-Japanese elements at Nanking. We are prepared to make many concessions in order to build up this united Anti-Japanese Front. You know that the Chinese Soviet Government now guarantees full religious freedom for all believers. We guarantee protection for the lives, property, and trade of all foreigners in China except the Japanese. We are in favour of alliance with any friendly foreign nation that is prepared to treat our country as an equal."

This was a more concrete version of the policy with which we were already familiar. It had been explained to me by a Communist spokesman in Sian as a change of tactics rather than of policy—the phrase he used was "Making use of the contradictions in your opponents' policies." But what chances it might have of success were not easy to foresee.

"What is your attitude towards this present situation?" I asked the young Red leader. "If a peaceful settlement of the crisis in the North-west is impossible, will you fight Nanking again?"

"If it comes to fighting, of course the Red Army will support the North-west. But we are very anxious to avoid a civil war at this time. That is where the Red Army policy differs from the so-called 'leftist' policy of the younger Tungpei officers, who want to fight unless Chang Hsueh-liang returns to Sian. Civil war in China now would play into the hands of Japan. We are strongly in favour of a peaceful settlement."

He was direct enough, though I could imagine the

indignation of some of my Tungpei friends at this "peace at any price" attitude. Little Liu, who still thought in terms of armed resistance and "sacrificing himself," was looking very puzzled over some of it. I was not so sure myself of the new tactic: it sounded suspiciously like opportunism. But it was still too early to judge.

It was obvious enough that the march of the Red Armies to the south of Shensi had been a peaceful and not a warlike progress. This propaganda unit, for instance, was chiefly concerned to cultivate friendly relations with all classes of the populace, and lay a solid foundation of confidence as a prelude to any reconciliation with Nanking that might seem possible. The peasant's house occupied by the troop was swept and tidy; not one of the pathetic little household ornaments had been disturbed. And reports from San Yuan and other towns similarly occupied brought the same story.

These were the people who were supposed to sweep across the countryside, leaving a trail of burning villages and plundered temples in their wake. Even then, according to circumstantial reports in the Chinese Press, young peasants were being conscripted into the Red Armies, and women were being "communised" to meet the pleasure of the "Red bandits." The evacuating missionaries—if only to justify their evacuation—had painted a lurid picture of the Red terror in the North-west, after their own safe arrival in Shanghai. There were contradictions, of course: for some of the refugees who had actually met the Red troops described them as the best-disciplined and most orderly troops they had seen in China. But this apparently made them all the more dangerous.

The next day we had to get back to Sian. We left that little village with reluctance. But I had satisfied at least the most insistent demands of curiosity; and Liu was in an ecstasy. He had spent a night with the Red Army.

It was almost noon when we came in sight of the walls of Sian. As we pushed along the wide highway, we heard suddenly the roar of engines. There were planes flying above the city; one of them crossed over our heads. On its wings was the white Kuomintang sun.

Had the long-awaited air raid come at last? But there was no firing from the Sian defences. The planes were diving down almost to the roof-tops swerving up again perilously. It was stunt flying, and stunting with all its thrills: I had never seen such a reckless display.

At the air-field a number of planes were out on the landing-ground. Two of them took off as we watched. The pilots, I noticed, wore the uniform of the Government air force.

"It is the Dare-to-dies," Liu said in a mouthful. He explained, seeing my look of unrecognition.

A number of Nanking pilots had been held in Sian with the planes that had been kept by the Northwest. Now they were being obliged to take part in an air raid rehearsal. But in case the pilots should decide to depart with their planes in the direction of Loyang and safety, a corps of Tungpei students had been organised, whose duties were to sit behind the airmen and hold a pistol to their heads to see that they behaved. The pilots had one way of getting their revenge: most of the "Dare-to-die" corps had

never been up in an aeroplane before. Now they were, having the whole thing in a packed half-hour of excitement.

I felt a sudden wave of sympathy for the inexperienced "guards" in the big biplanes that were roaring down in such spectacular dives and spins. We heard later that several of them collapsed after their return to earth, and had to be taken to hospital. They were certainly among the unnamed heroes of the Revolution.

On January 28th the North-west celebrated the anniversary of the "Shanghai War," when the 19th Route Army under Tsai Ting-kai had put up such an unexpected resistance to the Japanese in 1932. A mass meeting was held in the Park of the Revolution, and the chief speaker announced was General Ma Chan-shan—the wiry little cavalry commander who, for a brief period, had gained world-fame as the only leader of Chinese resistance in Manchuria. "Two-gun Ma," as he was called by the Tungpei men, was credited with more than the usual number of senses: it was said that he could tell where distant armies were moving from the look of a horse-print or the smell of sheep-droppings. He was certainly a clever leader, and, as the "Hero of the Nonni River," was immensely popular with the Chinese people.

Ma Chan-shan's appearance on the platform was greeted by a storm of cheering from the crowd. But the wily Ma, who did not like committing himself in public, had a diplomatic cold, and delegated his speech to a younger representative. The star turn of the day was provided by one of our young friends from the Children's Vanguard, a *Hsiao hung kwei* who



"Against the Traitors" is the text of this youngster, whose twenty-minute address received a great ovation



This white-haired peasant gives an impassioned five-minute oration at the meeting of January 28th

THE SWAN SONG OF THE SWAN REBELS

spoke for at least twenty minutes in front of the microphone "against the traitors." It was a notable effort for a twelve-year-old. He was followed by a white-haired old peasant, who suddenly electrified the crowd by a passionate five-minute oration, which he accompanied by a kind of step and dance, and concluded by throwing his cap in the air with a quavering shout of "Down with Japanese Imperialism!"

But something had gone out of the mass movement; this meeting was much less spirited than those that had gone before. And it was not so difficult to find the reason.

For the North-west was splitting into several camps. One felt the confusion of the leaders reflected in the confused feeling of the masses. On the strength of many small evidences, I made my own analysis of the situation.

Negotiations had been proceeding secretly between the various groups and parties for some time now; it was impossible to get details of these parleys, but their general direction was clear enough. The Tungpei "radicals"—the "Young Officer" group which included Sun Ming-chiu and others like my friend Miao—were the extreme left wing; at this time they were demanding the immediate return of Chang Hsueh-liang to Sian as a necessary preliminary for any settlement. But what they wanted in any case was action; and if they could not get some positive anti-Japanese action out of Nanking, they were ready and even eager to fight for it. There was a real split here between the young officers and the rank and file on the one side, and some of the older and more reactionary commanders on the other.

Yang Hu-cheng still held out for a settlement on more favourable terms than Nanking was prepared to offer: and was prepared to fight, if necessary, for better conditions. His motives were less clear—and probably less sincere—than those of the Tungpei men, who had perhaps less to lose. But, with a general feeling that the co-operation which had formerly existed between all the groups in the North-west was breaking up, Yang was beginning to look out for himself. To the outside world, he still represented the chief leadership of the "rebels"; though a word which became more popular at this time was "recalcitrants." It was not badly suited to "Bandit Yang," who felt that he was getting a raw deal somewhere. And he did not have much difficulty, under the circumstances, in finding an object for his wrath.

For at last the position of the Red Army had become clear. And this was such an emphatic "Peace line," that both the Tungpei and Yang Hu-cheng's people, who had actually made the rising in December, and run the risks of mutiny to prevent another campaign against the Reds, were now inclined to accuse the Reds of exploiting the situation in their own interests.

The Communist policy throughout the whole Sian affair deserves careful study, for it was this that made possible that most unexpected and perhaps most politically significant event of 1937 in the Far East—the "re-marriage" of the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party after a breach of ten years.

It is clear enough in retrospect that, among the various parties in the North-west, only the Communists had a well-defined course of action and negotiation. The first news of the capture of Chiang,

Kai-shek revealed to them the possibilities of a situation that might bring them "back to Nanking"; or, in another and less happily chosen phrase, "back to 1927." Hence the immediate despatch of Chou En-lai to Sian; hence his long talks with Chiang Kai-shek; hence, with a logic that is unmistakeable (but which proved very difficult of acceptance to many of the Tungpei "leftists"), his strong demand for the release of the Generalissimo. What might be described as a "personal advantage" was gained here which only the sudden and unexpected arrest of Chiang Kai-shek made possible.

And so later, when a situation developed in which war against the North-west was threatened, and in which the intransigence of Yang Hu-cheng and the enthusiasm of the younger Tungpei officers seemed not unlikely to precipitate a serious clash, the Communist representatives held steadily for peace, even if an immediate advantage should be lost. They valued more highly than any of the possible gains of military action, the chance they now discerned of rallying all the liberal and progressive elements of the nation behind the commanding figure of the Generalissimo. It was a gamble on the future—above all, a gamble on the dilemma of Chiang Kai-shek, which the Sian crisis had so openly revealed. So long as Chiang had to depend for political power on what were classed as the "anti-Japanese elements," the United Front against Japan was not impossible.

The effect of this policy, in the last critical days of the Sian imbroglio, was to put the Communists and the Red Army on the right wing of the grouping in the North-west. And though the Red policy may appear straightforward enough now, at the time it

led to serious misunderstandings. On February 15th the Third Plenary Session of the Kuomintang was to be held in Nanking: the Reds were especially anxious to have their own "United Front" proposals come up for favourable consideration at this Party Congress. In the meantime, they were opposed to any violent action of any kind, and most of all to a general outbreak of hostilities.

In Sian, in the last days of January, one felt on all sides the clash of different interests and different policies within the "rebel" forces. Po Ku and other Red leaders spent many hours in patient explanation of their policy to the young Tungpei group; but without conspicuous success. For the first time the new "line" of the Communist Party was being tried out; conciliation was a strange weapon for the Red Army to be using, but they did not spare their efforts to restrain their more eager and rebellious associates. In the end their counsel carried the day. But not before the split in the camp had developed into open insurrection.

XIX

DIRECT ACTION

IT was February, the month of revolution. And in Sian the world seemed to be standing still. All the news that we heard was by radio, when late at night we listened in on the short wave to European stations.

Madrid—"the last trench of liberty in Europe"—was always on the point of falling but never fell. In Russia, the Trial dragged on slowly to its inevitable conclusion—tune in to any of a dozen stations, Moscow or Irkutsk or Vladivostok, and always it was the same tale of Trotsky and terrorism. People's Front in France, United Front in England, Fascist Front in Spain (there was a war in Spain)—somehow it all held in suspense, like a news-reel suddenly frozen into a still. Who in Europe, in those days, could see beyond Madrid?

Sydney, Australia. . . . "Hammond plays a crisp forcing shot between the covers; they're running . . ." Cricket, it seemed, occupied the attention of the continent "down under." *Hong Kong*. . . . "The cost of the new defences on the island will mean, of course, considerable additional strain on the local taxpayer." Britain was arming in the Far East; but for what? *Tokio*. . . . "The cabinet crisis continues; in view of the opposition of the Army, the dissolution of the Diet appears inevitable." Internal crisis in Japan; how long would that continue? All these familiar

features of the Far Eastern scene were almost reassuring. *Nanking*. . . . "The Chinese Government has decided to make a goodwill contribution of \$200,000 towards the relief of victims of the disastrous Mississippi floods in the United States. . . ." This might almost sound ironical; already, in Szechuan, millions of Chinese peasants were facing starvation in the winter famine. "General Fu Tso-yi, Commander of the Chinese defenders in Suiyuan, describes the gallantry of his troops in the face of heavy odds. . . . Five hundred Chinese soldiers, poorly equipped and lightly armed, routed thousands of heavily armed invaders." One could understand the gratification in the charming female voice of the announcer, but why should she be so thrilled that the "defenders of the nation" had only rifles against tanks and aeroplanes? Did Chinese soldiers need such odds as these to stimulate their heroism? Nanking had tanks and planes and heavy artillery; but all these were needed, it seemed, to suppress the untimely suggestion in the North-west that a better use might be found for them in Suiyuan.

Not forty miles to the east of Sian, two armies faced each other across a shallow river-valley. They were prepared to fight, but what were they fighting for? The Government troops, of course, were obeying orders to suppress a rebellion. And the armies of the North-west, who had struck against further civil war against the communists, now appeared to be challenging Nanking on the instigation of a local war-lord. If war should come, it would not be a war of their making; but few people were likely to give them credit for that.

No one really wanted war. Perhaps Yang Hu-cheng might have forced the issue, if he thought that the Red Army would support him. But he knew that the Red Army did not want to fight. The stalemate could not last for ever; someone had to come to terms.

Already, it was said, a settlement had virtually been reached. The three armies of the North-west—the Tungpei, Hsipei, and Red forces—would withdraw from Sian, keeping in close contact, and making Lanchow rather than the Shensi capital their base. It was a retreat from glory; but at least it would avoid the dreaded alternative of civil war.

Little Liu came to see me in a most dejected mood. “If the Tungpei army goes to Kansu, then I must go with it. In Lanchow there is no water, no food. How shall we live?”

To cheer him up, I suggested a cinema; it might be the last he would see for some time. There was only one foreign film in Sian, which had been showing over and over again at the principal theatre. Appropriately enough, this was Wallace Beery in *Viva Villa!* and it had been immensely popular. But we had both seen it twice. I suggested a Chinese film.

As luck would have it, we ran straight into a piece of “New Life” propaganda. The film was a family saga; it showed the grand old patriarch, whose sons forget their filial duties, and prefer a life of excitement in the city to the old country home. The chief social evils of China, one gathered from the story, were cabarets and indecorum; when finally the family is reunited, and the grandson prepares to carry on as an official in the place of the grey-bearded old scholar, the old man can die content. The film, I noticed,

was received without enthusiasm; it was well enough made, but as remote from modern China as the morality it strove to inculcate.

Liu sighed when it was done. "This film can deceive nobody," he commented. "My father is an official like that—he would like me to complete my examinations, and make a good marriage. When I left the University, and came to Sian, he was very angry—he says that I am unfilial. But how can we build a new China when all the sons do just what their fathers want?"

"Do you ever write to your father?" I asked him.

"No. If I go back to my family," he said bitterly, and with a touch of real insight, "I shall become just like the son in this film. I will go to Lanchow, with the Tungpei men: or perhaps I may join the Red Academy, if only I can get there. This is better than being a small official, sitting in an office and drinking tea."

The hotel was almost completely deserted. The manager, a dapper little Shanghai man, very ill-at-ease among the Northern barbarians, lived in a state of constant alarm. If there should be any unrest among the troops, he felt himself and his staff of Southerners to be a very likely object of attack. A good Kuomintang man, he made no secret of his abhorrence of such violent methods as had been used in the North-west in the last few weeks. Perforce he had stayed at his post, for he had to look after the hotel. But as soon as it was "all over," he assured me, he would lose no time in getting a transfer back to the big city. Life in Sian was too exciting for comfort.

The hotel was losing money; the railway was losing money; everyone was losing money. This

seemed to me one hopeful factor in the situation: the big commercial interests would be doing their best to put pressure on the Government, and break the blockade.

"How much longer can it last?" wailed the manager. "I hear that the troops are withdrawing from the front; and then again, that some of them refuse to withdraw. People say that Yang Hu-cheng will fight with the Tungpei troops; if the fighting starts here in Sian, what will become of all of us?"

But many indications pointed to a peaceful settlement. Yu Hsueh-chung, who had been in command in Kansu, and was probably, after Chang Hsueh-liang, the most influential of the Tungpei generals, had arrived in Sian, and was staying in the headquarters of Yang Hu-cheng. On the morning of February 2nd, the North-western National Salvation union issued a manifesto on the peace negotiations. It was strongly against civil war, and deprecated any efforts on the part of either side to gain special advantages in the settlement. The appearance of this manifesto was regarded as a first announcement that an agreement had actually been reached.

But that very day came a most dramatic intervention.

I had gone out in search of news, but no one was at home. Miao had vanished beyond recall. The newspaper offices were almost deserted. Even Liu had disappeared. There was a new tension in the streets; every second shop had its shutters up, for by that uncanny anticipation of danger that sometimes runs through a Chinese city, they seemed to have been warned that there was trouble in the wind. The

guards outside the New City, where Yang Hu-cheng and Yu Hsueh-chung had their staff headquarters, had been doubled. At noon, the sun was bright and metallic over the grey-tiled roofs.

I was having a solitary meal of boiled mutton and sesame cakes in a Mohammedan restaurant, when the noise in the streets grew suddenly louder and then again still. From the south, near the Drum Tower, came the muffled sound of firing. There was often firing to be heard in Sian, from the practice ranges at the barracks; but there were no barracks in that direction. What was happening in the city?

No one knew. Perhaps there was fighting, the waiter said phlegmatically. When I came out into the streets, all was quiet; there were few people about, but the rickshaws plied as usual.

Rickshaw-men are usually as well-informed as anybody; but I could get nothing out of the Shensi stalwart who pulled me back to the hotel. "The city gates were closed," he said. This might mean almost anything or nothing: the gates were closed in Peking for a student demonstration. But I remembered the sound of firing from the South city.

In the hotel, the manager greeted me rapturously. "Oh, Mr. Bertram, I am so glad you are back! Something terrible has happened; have you heard what it is?"

I hadn't; but neither had he, or anyone else. I spent a fruitless half-hour at the telephone. There was nothing for it but to sit tight and wait for news. Everything was so thoroughly disorganised that obviously it would take some time to settle down again. That evening rumours were current that various leaders, from Yang Hu-cheng down, had been shot:

but no one seemed to know who had done the shooting, or what it was about.

I had retired to bed, rather earlier than usual, with Shakespeare's sonnets. It was one way of killing time. Sooner or later someone would come in.

When I consider everything that grows
Holds in perfection but a little moment,
That this huge stage presenteth naught but shows
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
When I perceive that men as plants increase,
Cheered and checkt even by the self-same sky,
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
And wear their brave state out of memory——

Liu burst into my room suddenly; he was very excited. "I must talk to you!" he exclaimed.

"Fine," I said. "Can *you* tell me what happened this afternoon?"

He glanced apprehensively at the door. Then "We have shot Wang Yi-chih and Ho Chu-kuo!" he announced dramatically.

"You shot them? Do you mean the Vanguard?"

He nodded, wide-eyed. "You must not tell anybody, yet. They were traitors to the North-west—selling out on us to Nanking. Sun Ming-chiu said they had to be shot."

I was thinking hard. Wang Yi-chih was one of the senior Tungpei commanders; he was known to be a reactionary, and opposed to the younger "radical" group, but I had always heard that he was genuinely "anti-Japanese." Ho Chu-kuo was another matter: he was the chief Tungpei cavalry commander, but not a North-easterner by any calculation. He had always been Chiang Kai-shek's man, and was almost

the only general in the North-west who had continued to fight the Communists after the truce with the Tungpei army. I knew that Ho was universally unpopular with the Tungpei army, and he had certainly been carrying on private negotiations with Nanking.

"What was the idea of shooting Wang Yi-chih?" I asked.

But Liu was badly shaken; he was just a youngster, and clearly he did not know what to make of it. He had worshipped Sun Ming-chiu, the young commander of the Tungpei Vanguard, and would follow him anywhere. But where this last action would lead, it was not easy to see.

"Now I must leave with the Special Regiment," he said nervously. "There will be a split in the Tungpei army, and we do not know what Yang Hucheng will do."

He wrung my hand; another of the student cadets was waiting at the door.

"Good-bye, my friend. We will try to join the Red Army in the North. Perhaps, now, they will not want to receive us. But there is nowhere else to go."

"Good-bye, *tung chih*, and good luck!"

He gave me a wan smile and departed hastily into the night. I could appreciate the plight of these bewildered students, who had been so much at a loss in the last days of uncertainty. They had heard the Communist leaders expound the novel doctrine of "supporting Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of a united China"; this was too much of a *volte-face* for inexperienced "leftists." All the settlement negotiations had passed above their heads—they had wanted action, and instead they had had weeks of suspense,

followed by an uncertain anti-climax. Sun Ming-chiu, I knew, was against withdrawal: and clearly enough, this sudden coup had been an attempt to prevent "capitulation" to Nanking. What effects it would have remained to be seen.

Next day, at last I managed to get in touch with Chang, who would surely have the latest news. The sight of his broad, puzzled face was an immense relief.

"What do you make of all this? A Tungpei "leftist" coup?"

He grinned involuntarily. "This is the work of your friends, Sun and Ying and Miao. They always want to start a revolution." He gave me the full story.

On the morning of February 2nd, the same "young officer" group who had planned the arrest of Chiang Kai-shek had held an emergency meeting to consider the situation. A settlement was in sight which they considered a betrayal and they laid all the blame for this on the older commanders, who—they claimed—were thinking only of themselves. They had definite information about the "treachery" of some of their leaders; and there had been an old feud between the junior officers and General Wang Yi-chih, commander of the 67th Army, who had had an unimpressive record in Manchuria. It was unfortunate for some of the highest commanders that they should have amassed considerable private fortunes when the Tungpei army as a whole was in such straits.

Wang Yi-chih, it seems, had had a presentiment of disaster. Not long before, he had given a dinner party; his guests could not understand his nervous-

ness, until at last he had said, "Don't you realise that there are thirteen of us here? And this means that one of us must die?" From this time he had remained in close retirement in his house near the Ku Lou. Here Sun Ming-Chiu and his Special Regiment had come from their emergency meeting. They broke into the house, overpowered the guards, and shot the general in his bed.

But this was only a beginning. Wang's second-in-command, General Sun Hsueh-li, was seized and placed under arrest. The raid was continued; General Chiang Pin, Head of Communications, who was known to have held up many of the Young Marshal's telegrams, and interfered very effectively with all the messages that passed through his hands, was also arrested. In the Hua Yuan, a picturesque hostel with a rather shady reputation, another ranking commander on the Tungpei Staff had his lodgings: this was Colonel Hsu Feng. Secret wireless equipment was discovered in his rooms, and he was added to the list of "traitors." These three, without more ado, were taken to the East Gate and shot against the wall.

The chief object of the coup, however, had been Ho Chu-kuo, against whom the Tungpei men had very definite grievances. Ho was in Yang Hu-cheng's headquarters, inside the New City. Sun and his associates had a regular right of entry into the Hsin Cheng; they used this now, and succeeded in surrounding Yang's house, where they knew Ho Chu-kuo was staying. This terrified general, realising that his hour had come if any of the Tungpei Vanguard could get a shot at him, clung to the skirts of Yang Hu-cheng, who almost alone was safe against the mutineers. Many attempts were made to entice

Yang Hu-cheng away to the telephone, to the gates, to any place where the wretched Ho could not shelter behind him. But Yang stood his ground, and at length the frustrated putschists, realising the danger for themselves, made good their escape.

"So Ho Chu-kuo escaped?"

Chang nodded. "Yang Hu-cheng saved him." He wrinkled his heavy eyebrows. "It is very strange—Yang protected him, and he has got out a warrant for the arrest of Sun and Ying and the rest. But he let them escape."

"You mean—he encouraged the coup, in order to protect Chiang Kai-shek's man?"

"Perhaps. It is all very complicated. I know that Sun was sincere—this group has always been against a settlement, until Marshal Chang returned. But perhaps Yang Hu-cheng used them to get a better position for himself."

"Did Chou En-lai know about the coup?"

"I do not know. The Communists were very much against any action like this. Some people say that the coup was also directed against them, and that they had to go into hiding. I am quite sure they had no connection with it."

Whatever else it had effected, the coup completely broke up the Tungpei "left wing." No further opposition to the settlement was likely to arise. Already, in fact, the North-western troops were withdrawing from the front. The last desperate effort to prevent withdrawal had failed.

On February 4th, Yang Hu-cheng and Yu Hsueh-chung together issued a Peace Manifesto in which the recent events in the North-west were reviewed,

and four points stated: Chang Hsueh-liang must be given back his civil rights before the Kuomintang Plenary Session; the Tungpei and Hsipei armies would withdraw according to the Government plan; the mass movement, and the activities of the National Salvation association, must be protected and supported by the Nanking Government. This was the first official recognition of a settlement published by the Sian authorities, and it was understood that within a week the evacuation and change-over in Sian would be completed. On February 4th, the North-western Rising came to a premature and inglorious end. From December 12th to February 4th is fifty-five days; in Sian, with the usual Chinese love of double numbers, the movement was at once christened the "Fifty-five Days' Revolt."

But the three days after the "leftist" coup of February 2nd were full of alarms. The troops who had been under Wang Yi-chih were said to be rebelling and threatening Yang Hu-cheng's men; as the other Tungpei regiments left the city, there was practically no force to take control in an emergency. For the first time since December 12th, there was a feeling of real unrest within the walls of Sian. Martial law had been proclaimed again, and after nine o'clock the streets were deserted.

No "terms" of the final settlement were ever published, but from various officials in Sian I was able to put together a list of clauses on which there was general agreement. The Tungpei army, the largest single force in the North-west, was to withdraw to Kansu; in the meantime it was falling back on Pinchow, a town near the Kansu border. Yu Hsueh-chung remained in direct command. Yang Hu-

cheng's 17th Route Army was to move to the north of the Wei River. When this evacuation of Sian was completed, General Ku Chu-tung, representing the Military Commission at Nanking, was to move into Sian and take Provisional Command. The Red Army was to move back to its own area in the north of the province; but it was generally understood that a real agreement between the Reds and Nanking had been struck, and that they would henceforth be supported from Nanking as part of the regular forces of the Government. The whole United Front policy was to come up for discussion at the forthcoming Kuomintang Congress; meantime, the National Salvation movement in the North-west was to be protected and supported by the authorities.

There was nothing very sensational about this, except the part of it affecting the Red Army; and at best this was a "goodwill understanding," which amounted to little more than a temporary truce. What interested me more, at the moment, was the fate of my friends in Sian.

It was hard enough to find any of them. For as soon as the North-western troops began to withdraw, much of the organisation which had existed in Sian during the "fifty-five days" broke up. Chang, who had been promoted from his former paper to the editorship of the largest daily in Sian, knew that he would be automatically succeeded as soon as the Kuomintang officials returned. And nearly everyone else who had worked for the temporary "United Anti-Japanese Council" was in the same boat.

But it was not just a question of losing their jobs. For it was inevitable that there should be reprisals,

and all the Blue Shirts and secret police who had been released by the North-western authorities were waiting to pay off old scores. The "Red Terror" in Sian might have been a myth; but the "White Terror" was real enough. For the few days (and especially nights) in the period of the change-over in Sian, everyone who had been active in connection with organising or propaganda work went underground. The favourite refuge was San Yuan, to the north of the city; the Red Army had withdrawn, and Yang Hu-cheng had concentrated most of his troops in the town. From San Yuan there was an open road to the Red region in Shenpei.

And many fugitives must have covered it in those last days. The students went in scores, many of them to join the Red Military Academy and the Red Political Training School. For there was no guarantee that Nanking would keep to the (supposed) terms of the settlement, and until the new Provisional Headquarters were set up, there was no real civil authority in the city. It is difficult to give any impression of Sian in those early February days; the evacuation of the North-western troops was orderly enough, but the rest was a *sauve qui peut*.

The nights were hectic. Places without military guard were raided by plain-clothes men armed with Brownings, and numbers of private feuds were settled out of hand. In some quarters of the city there was looting; and there was no one to check it. For Yang Hu-cheng's guards did not move from the New City—almost the only spot, in the whole of Sian, that was safe. The Chinese New Year was approaching, and normally shops and bath-houses would have done a roaring trade until all hours. But

now, after nine o'clock, no one ventured willingly on to the streets. There were too many roving gunmen abroad.

Agnes was with the Red Army in the North: that was probably as well for her, I reflected. Liu and his friends had vanished across the border. Others we knew went armed, and never slept twice in the same bed. Chou En-lai was still in the city, but no one knew where.

One night I woke suddenly from a disturbing dream.

My room was never very dark, for a street-light shone directly into it across the hotel drive. It was almost three in the morning, and a faint breeze stirred the window curtains. I always slept with an open window, for the hotel was centrally heated by an obscure system which reached its maximum intensity of desiccation late in the evening.

But now it was very cold, and I found that I was trembling.

In my dream I had been moving cautiously down a dim flight of stairs, at the foot of which was a single light, and a door that opened into darkness. I had reached the lowest stair, and paused—with the pause of dream that lasts for infinity—before the open doorway.

In that moment (or was it the moment of waking?) a voice had whispered behind me, so clearly that I heard it still: "Your three friends, Miao and Sun and Ying, are dead. They were shot tonight."

Whether this was a message brought by night, or a trick of my own overwrought nerves, did not seem to matter: I recognised the fact with a dull con-

viction of certainty. For a week I had been the only guest in the hotel, and at night the whole staff vanished out of call into some obscure recess. It would have been easy enough for someone to come into my room.

I went to the window and looked out. The concrete drive stretched blank and deserted to the closed iron gates. The night sky was remote and cold, even the stars seemed frozen. The city was not still, for I heard the sound of motor-cars driven fast along empty streets. From the north, where there was a glow of lights above the wall (that would be the railway, of course), came the clang of hammers on steel. They were working night repair shifts.

It was time for me to leave Sian, I decided suddenly. I closed the window, and for the first time locked my bedroom door.

XX

NATIONAL FRONT

THE next day, the first Nanking troops arrived in Sian. They came in two large military trucks, which drew up at the Guest-house to deposit a number of officers. The khaki uniforms were curiously unfamiliar, after the blue-grey to which we had grown so accustomed. The trucks themselves, with their weather-proof hoods and padded seats, had an amateur look compared with the battered open lorries in which fur-capped Tungpei troops had hurtled up and down the streets.

But the blockade had broken at last, and on the steps the manager beamed and rubbed his hands. The lounge, that had been deserted so long, awoke to a new life. Even the office clerk, who had moped all these weeks in solitude, slicked down his hair again and assumed a professional air of studied indolence.

“When will the trains be running again?”

For once he had no papers to consult. “The first express goes out tonight at midnight. It is over-sold already—they have closed the office. But I think they have kept a few tickets. You would like to leave tonight?”

“Please. A second-class sleeper to Peking.”

I went out into the streets that now I knew so well

—the dusty road past the white gate of the Hsin Cheng, and the broad expanse of the Hsi Ta Chieh. I passed the office of the *Siking Min Pao*, where my friends had worked. Chen was there still, but the presses were idle. Publication was suspended to await the seal of a new authority.

"The Central troops have come, and I'm leaving tonight." Chen nodded slowly; his fine dark eyes were very sad. "Where is Chang?"

"You want to see him?"

"I thought we might all have supper together, if it can be arranged. Can he come?"

We fixed on a place of meeting. The newspaper office was as melancholy as an abandoned pit-head. The editorial staff, or what remained of it, sat gloomily around the stove. Like the Hollow Men

Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together,
Are quiet and meaningless . . ."

One of them, I noticed, with his feet up on the stove, was reading Lenin.

"You'd better put that away, before the Blue Shirts come."

"They were here last night. We've got a couple of guards now."

"Still, the *San Min Chu I* is safer."

All of them had packed their scanty possessions, ready for flight. A journalist who ventures into politics has a precarious living in China; he does well to keep his bags packed.

"What will happen to the paper? It still belongs to Chang Hsueh-liang, doesn't it?"

"Chang Hsueh-liang is a prisoner. We thought of taking the presses to Lanchow, but there is not time. And Ku Chu-tung, who is coming tomorrow, does not like newspaper-men. He has killed many of them." The comment was more matter-of-fact and cheerful than the picture it evoked. And suddenly I remembered my question.

"Have you heard anything about Sun Ming-chiu and the rest?"

"No one has heard from them." He answered very slowly. "But there is a rumour I heard this morning——"

"Yes."

"—That they were attacked by Wang Yi-chih's men at Hsienyang, and all were killed. It may be true."

"Last night?"

"Yes, last night."

There were so many rumours, but it might be true. Anything might be true; for the whole movement in the North-west was breaking up. To give way before the Nanking troops might be a matter of strategy; but this was crumbling from within.

"What do you think of the settlement?" I asked these young North-easterners. "Is it really a capitulation?"

My friend shrugged his shoulders. "It was this—or civil war. And anything is better than civil war, just now. If Nanking keeps the agreement, we have gained something."

"And the Tungpei army?"

He lowered his voice. "They are not content with this settlement. When the last Tungpei troops marched out, they said, 'It is another September

18th.' Many of them are very indignant with the Red Army."

I could understand that. On the face of it, the Tungpei men had had very much the worst of the bargain. The Reds had nothing to lose, and everything to gain, by making their peace with Nanking—if it was peace on their own terms.

I continued my round of the city. Shops were opening up briskly for the New Year, and the streets were crowded. There were still some of Yang Hu-cheng's troops about, but they went unarmed.

Outside the Kuomintang headquarters was a scene of confusion. A long line of carts had been loaded up with papers and office equipment, and was preparing to move off. This building had been the office of the Mass Movement Committee, and one of the most interesting centres of organisation during the whole North-western movement. I remembered the rooms as they had been, filled with young students composing endless manifestoes and peasant organisers returning from the country districts to report progress. It had been a hive of revolutionary activity; now, I supposed, the New Life would reassert its tranquil reign, and the old officials return to their official slumbers.

The broad main street looked wider and emptier than before. I realised that this was because the wide banners, which had stretched full across the street at every crossing, had disappeared. And on the Drum Tower, men were working on the great green placards that covered the stone base of the four walls. Here the original "Eight-Point Programme" of

Chang Hsueh-liang had been inscribed in great white characters: "FREEDOM OF SPEECH! FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY! FULL POLITICAL FREEDOM!" Now, I noticed, the inscriptions were being painted out in Kuomintang blue. They were wasting no time.

All the familiar posters were missing from the walls. I wondered idly if this had been done by order; or if the Sian citizens, having weathered one political storm, were taking no chances on another by removing all incriminating evidence. Certainly now the city wore a subdued and chastened look. I dropped in at the radio station; they were playing gramophone records. The collapse was complete.

"You see, things always end like this in China," the missionary was saying. "A good old Chinese compromise." I was feeling too depressed to argue with him; besides, he was obviously right.

It should have been something of an occasion, for the tea-party of half a dozen included all the foreigners who had remained in Sian after the evacuation. I had blundered in upon it by accident, in search of my friend from the Baptist Mission. And I was afraid I might have interrupted the celebrations.

"The youngsters are sincere enough," the speaker continued. "But what can they do, when everything is settled above their heads? All that really happens is that a lot of money changes hands—between the generals. And the people are never so glad as when it's all over."

He had seen four-and-twenty revolutions, and he should know what he was talking about. But those who have lived in China too long have, like the Chinese themselves, too much tolerance. I fancy it is

difficult for any missionary to keep his idealism for long; in China, it must be very difficult.

I looked around this little group (all of them, as it happened, British) who had chosen to spend their lives in a foreign country for a purpose which many people would find incomprehensible. Three of them were grey-haired in the service of their faith; they were the best of the mission-workers in Sian, or at least the most devoted, for they were the ones who had stuck to their posts in the face of danger. But only one of them—and he not the youngest—seemed to me to have any real feeling for the issues that had been raised so dramatically in the North-west in these last eight weeks. I turned to him now.

“What do you think of it all?”

He weighed his answer carefully. “The violence, of course, I regret. But much good has come of this already. We have learnt something about the Communists, for instance, that we could never have known before. When I talked with Chou En-lai, as quietly as I am talking with you now, I had an impression of sincerity from him that means more to me than any number of manifestoes. I think Chiang Kai-shek learnt much, too, in Sian—much that it was necessary for him to know. Certainly the prospects for real unity in China are more favourable today than they have ever been.”

This—I felt—was not easy optimism. “You liked Chou En-lai?”

“Very much. He is one of the most intelligent Chinese I have ever met. And I must say”—he added with some warmth—“I think it is most unfortunate that some of our fellow-missionaries should have spread such baseless and alarmist stories about

the Communists here in the North-west. These stories came from the worst kind of prejudice, and not from fact. They should be publicly denied, for they will do us no good in our work here."

The last point was not without interest; for unquestionably it was the exaggerated accounts of a few missionaries that had painted the picture of a "Red Sian," and caused all the fuss about the safety of the foreigners in the city. How much of this changed attitude, I wondered, was likely to last: and how much was due to a natural indignation of those who had stuck it out against those who hadn't? But there seemed to be a general agreement that the Communists, by and large, had "behaved very well." Chou En-lai was the hero of the day. One only needed to have had the slightest acquaintance with the old familiar bitterness of the missionaries towards the Chinese Reds, to realise how much this meant.

And this was, in fact, the one clear and obvious gain that might (it was still too early to say; "had already") come out of the Sian affair: a revised approach to the "problem" of Communism in China. The universal relief, for instance, at the avoidance of civil war—what did it mean unless the campaigns against the Reds were discontinued? Foreigners living in China, especially those who had known the old destructive militarism at its worst, had tended in recent years to put a perhaps exaggerated faith in the one power that seemed to be producing order out of chaos. And as the authority of the Nanking Government, by a series of manœuvres that were so many political triumphs, was extended gradually over the Central and Southern provinces, most foreigners in

the country had become resolutely pro-Nanking. Ever since the conversion of the Generalissimo and the launching of the New Life Movement, the missionaries to a man had been passionate supporters of Chiang Kai-shek. They had a vested interest in him, for Christianity in China had come at last to a place of honour.

By some curious trick of psychology which anyone living in China, and feeding upon the carefully concocted reports of an official Press agency, might unconsciously adopt with the greatest of ease, the campaigns against the Communists had ceased to be regarded as "civil war" in the generally accepted sense. Hence the real cleverness of the label "Communist bandit." In China, bandits, like the poor, are always with us; and bandit suppression must appear a normal operation of any effective authority, local or national. But the appalling total of lives lost in the ten-year campaigns against the Red Armies—however cheap the life of a Chinese peasant—would long since have outraged public opinion in any country where public opinion was free to express itself. The Communists were never "bandits"; in the matter of style, the original Red Army in Kiangsi had probably a more legitimate right to call itself the Army of the National Revolution than the forces which carried Chiang Kai-shek into power.

This is an academic point. But any sympathiser with China's struggle for national independence could only deplore the ravages that the "Bandit Suppression" campaigns had wrought. The Communists, for a decade, had been the major internal problem of the Nanking Government; and no possible solution had been allowed short of their

complete extermination. The policy of extermination, however, had proved costly and inconclusive. Even though the Fifth Anti-Red Campaign in Kiangsi and Fukien destroyed the main base that the Communists had so laboriously built up, the Red Armies had merely changed their ground. And the Red Armies on the move were probably more dangerous for Nanking than when they had been enclosed by an iron ring in their mountain fastness. Agrarian unrest followed with deadly certainty upon their wake across half China; and the final position that they occupied at the end of 1936 was far from reassuring to the National Government.

Those who did not strenuously oppose the suggestion of a tentative agreement with the Reds at the time of the Sian incident—and they represented the most courageous and liberal elements in China—used very often as a mollifying argument the “reduced state” of the Red Armies. What remained in the North-west, they claimed, was a mere dispirited rabble, exhausted by continuous fighting and forced marches, isolated in a poverty-stricken area, and militarily contemptible. It would be a happy action on the part of the Nanking Government, they urged, to extend to fugitives in such a plight some gesture of reconciliation, if only as an alms for oblivion.

But it is necessary here to consider the other side of the picture. In the North-west of China the Reds held, in actual fact, a larger single territory—though poorer and more sparsely populated—than any they had ever occupied before. It was an area more easily defended against attack, since they could fall back on almost impregnable strongholds in the Kansu mountains; and the food problem was never likely

to be serious for such hardened campaigners. Moreover, there was no lack of that invaluable commodity, the absence of which had been such a handicap to the blockaded Soviet of Kiangsi—salt.

The Red Armies in the North-west, whose strength (in regular and well-armed troops, as distinct from partisans) was estimated by a foreign observer at 100,000, were for the first time under a united command, with all the most experienced leaders—Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh, Ho Lung, Hsiao Ke, Hsu Hai-tung, and the rest whose names were almost legendary—in full co-operation for the first time in many years. From a base on the borders of three provinces, Shensi, Kansu, and Ninghsia, they could strike north and west to establish contact with Outer Mongolia and Sinkiang, opening up channels of communication with the outer world that they had never possessed since the loss of Swatow. In the view of many competent judges, the position of the Chinese Reds was stronger in 1936, both as regards defence and potentialities for future action, than it had ever been.

And beyond question, the political position of the Chinese Communists had been greatly strengthened by the change of policy which became effective from the beginning of 1936. More and more they were gaining ground for the idea of a United Front against what few people could deny to be the major enemy of the Chinese nation. As one delegate to the Yosemite Conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations remarked in August 1936, "Japanese aggression was making Communists good Chinese citizens." Something of the old inflexible opposition was beginning to break down.

Both these views—that the Chinese Reds were “finished,” and that they were in a position so strong and challenging that a new tactic must be devised to deal with them—entered into the negotiations begun directly by Chou En-lai in Sian. But the Communists were by no means in an unfavourable position to strike a bargain, and—unlike Nanking—they were very little concerned with questions of “face” if only they could get their way. The offer made by Chou personally to Chiang Kai-shek, and later repeated (incredible as it might have seemed a year before) to the Central Executive Committee of the Kuomintang in Nanking, was a formal compromise, with each side no doubt making its own reservations as to how far that compromise must be allowed to go. Nanking could interpret it, if they wished, as a renunciation of Communism by the Chinese Communists; the Reds themselves regarded it as a necessary concession to meet a deepening crisis in national policy.

At the time of the capture of Chiang Kai-shek there were two possibilities open to the “rebel” forces, which were—with the addition of the Chinese Red Armies—a very formidable combination. The first was positive action. They might have seized Tungkwan, fortified the pass, and set up for themselves a People’s Government in the North-west, defying Nanking, and calling on the militarists in the South-western and Northern provinces (who were anti-Nanking for their own reasons) to bring pressure to bear on the National Government, so as to effect its radical reorganisation and liberate the National Salvation movement. This was the course favoured by “Leftists” like Sun Ming-chiu, and at one time by

the Communists themselves. It would probably have caused the outbreak of hostilities on a larger scale than actually occurred; but the release of Chiang Kai-shek was a card that could always have been played at a convenient moment to bring about a peaceful settlement, reconciliation, and perhaps a real gain in the direction of political liberties. Whether it would have involved war with Japan remains an open question.

This opportunity was lost through a number of factors—the failure to hold Tungkwan, the difficulty of establishing communications with the provincial authorities, and divided purposes in the North-west itself after the first coup. When a course of action had been abandoned, compromise—and the release of Chiang Kai-shek—became inevitable. The peculiar circumstances that developed at Nanking, with a group in power eager to turn the situation to its own private advantage, made the intervention of Madame Chiang Kai-shek and T. V. Soong especially timely.

Before this, however, the Communists—who seem to have summed up the possibilities of the situation more rapidly than anyone else—had already veered away from the idea of a “separatist” People’s Government in the North-west, and came out strongly in favour of a goodwill settlement, the release of Chiang Kai-shek, and a National Front beginning from Nanking. Having once taken this line, they refused to be drawn away from it in all the weeks of suspense and bickering that followed; and in the end they were able—in the face of much discontented opposition—to persuade the Sian authorities to adopt their policy. So an open breach was avoided, and the “National Front” was given every chance of an

official inauguration from the Nanking Government, in a manner acceptable to the dignity of that somewhat touchy body. The honour and glory of solving an extremely delicate situation might go (and not undeservedly) to the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek, if only the substance of a real political unity could be guaranteed.

But was there any guarantee of the good faith of Nanking? In making the final settlement, the combined armies in the North-west had given up a strategic position which was unlikely to recur in the future. Chiang Kai-shek would not make the same mistake twice.

The Reds, for their part, had succeeded in winning a foothold at Nanking; but the cost was the loss of their North-western allies. For it seemed clear enough, on that last day in Sian, that the working combination between the Tungpei army, Yang Hu-cheng, and the Reds was badly broken. The North-eastern army was split within itself; ever since the death of Wang Yi-chih, the high commanders had taken alarm, each fearing that he might be the next victim. Yang Hu-cheng was trying to fend for himself; unless Nanking bought him out, he looked like being the biggest loser. The Reds, in the unfamiliar rôle of "loyalists," were trying to outdo the Shanghai bankers in praise of Chiang Kai-shek. All things considered, including the fact that they had fought him for ten years without a break, it was a very creditable performance.

Outside the restaurant where we met that evening, Nanking soldiers had just strung a new banner across

the street. The black characters were hardly dry on the white cloth.

"What does it say?" I asked.

Beneath his battered hat, Chang made a wry face. "Down with the Communist Bandits!" he read. "Co-operation with the Communists means Death!" It was a text from Wang Ching-wei, and hardly the best of omens for the National Front.

It was a curious last meal, in the inner room of a restaurant that (we had first made sure) had a convenient exit at the back. Ku Chu-tung, the Nanking commander, was to arrive the next day: already, they told me, Hu-cheng's private mansion—the most grandiose house in the city—was being prepared as his headquarters. Yang himself, like a sensible man, remained inside the Hsin Cheng. All the New Life signs were back again over shop doorways. Sian, it seemed, was preparing for an orthodox Chinese New Year; and Kuomintang blue would be the most fashionable colour.

Conversation was slow at first, for everyone had something on his mind. It was still a period of anxiety for many in the North-west; inevitably, in a day or so, arrests and probably executions would follow. These were the risks of the game, but the thought of them did not make for conviviality.

"It may not be so bad," I suggested. "In Canton, last year, they only reshuffled all official jobs and put out the old party. I don't think anyone wants more violence here. Besides, there's only one regiment of Central troops in Sian."

"Two divisions already," someone contradicted me. "And you see the slogans they're putting up outside."

"That may be just window-dressing." (It was; for the anti-Communist banners did not, in fact, stay up for very long.) "Why not have a happy New Year? At least, that's supposed to be lucky."

We ordered yellow wine, to drink the health of the Young Marshal—still a prisoner at Fenghua. The warm liquor loosened up the talk.

"You must drink first to Chiang Kai-shek," Chang insisted. "United Front, you know! Chiang is our leader now."

He was right; and we drank the toast with a flourish. "Better drink to the Red Army too," a voice said gloomily. "Soon there won't be one—only more Government troops, in a Special Area."

"But the Reds will never give up their army?"

"Who can tell, now? They seem to be trying to liquidate themselves, to save Chiang the trouble."

"Never!" someone protested hotly. "The Reds will never give up their army, or their soviet organisation. They may change the names, to satisfy Nanking. But that is just tactics—United Front strategy."

"Pretty poor strategy. They'll last just as long as it takes Chiang to isolate them again, and get the Tung-pei army out of the North-west!"

"No; Chiang has really changed. He has become much more democratic. . . ."

We were back in the familiar atmosphere of argument and debate that I knew so well in Peking. And even to talk, now, was a relief. Another month or so, and we would know better how things really stood.

But there was one last toast that had to be drunk before the party broke up. We stood for it.

"To the unity of China! National Front!"

It was a fine romantic gesture, with the gendarmes

outside and the waiters hovering behind the curtain.

"*Kan pei!* And to our next meeting!"

My bags were packed at the hotel; it was only a quarter of an hour to the station. The manager (already another man, now that he could sleep safely in his bed) gave me a friendly send-off. He apologised for not coming with me to the train.

"I am so busy now. You know, we are still very much in confusion. Many guests arriving tomorrow." He coughed deprecatingly. "I hope you have been comfortable here?"

"Very, thanks. I've had a grand time. Good-bye."

Out under the walls of Sian. I looked back once: the power-house was ablaze with light. The walls, heavily shadowed, were bare of guns. Over the gate, picked out in the beam of a searchlight, flew the National flag.

THE END

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